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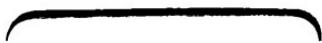
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SIR EVERARD'S DAUGHTER.

BY

JOHN CORDY JEAFFRESON,

AUTHOR OF "A BOOK ABOUT DOCTORS," "OLIVE BLAKE'S GOOD WORK,"
"LIVE IT DOWN," ETC., ETC.

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P R E F A C E.

‘Sir Everard’s Daughter’ appeared in the *Universal Review* during the first five months of the year 1860 ; but as that short-lived Magazine failed to obtain a large circulation, the story will be as good as an entirely new one to the readers who are now invited to turn over its pages.

JOHN CORDY JEAFFRESON.

June, 1863.

SIR EVERARD'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

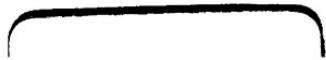
SHARSTED HIGH HOUSE.

ALL through the county, if a man said ‘I’m off for Sharsted,’ the answer was, ‘Remember me to Sir Everard.’ It was the same in all ranks; every one knew Sir Everard Adenbroke. He had a good word from all persons except the most malignant churls; and they, at the mention of the baronet’s name, kept their sour tempers to themselves.

Sometimes it is difficult to assign a good reason for a man’s popularity, but it was not so



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it after me.' Mr. Costerton was a rich man. He might, without cramping himself, have built a mansion ten times as spacious and imposing as the High House; but he could not have built clumps of oak, and avenues of walnut, and cedars of enormous dimensions. It is possible to transplant great trees, but the process is costly. In these days to move Birnam Wood, root and branch, to Dunsinane would be merely a question of money. But to surround a new mansion with old timber was beyond the power of Mr. Costerton, although he was a great man in his own quiet nook of an English county, and, besides doing in most despotic fashion what he pleased with 'his own,' contrived to meddle not a little with the property of his neighbours. There are a few things which time only can accomplish for the most ambitious. 'Your grace,' said a notorious alderman when he was dining at a famous duke's table, 'these spoons are not so heavy as my wife's.' 'Possibly, sir,' was the reply, 'your spoons have not been so many years in your family as my plate has been in mine.' Mr. Costerton's fingers did not itch for Sir

Everard's antique plate; but the banker longed to be lord of the High House, and owner of the fine park in which it stood.

Sir Everard sat in the loose shooting jacket, which was his ordinary morning costume, at his breakfast-table.

Opposite to him was his only daughter, Lucy Adenroke, about one-and-twenty years of age, beautiful, with a girlish reproduction of her father's good looks, and just then rendered more than ordinarily attractive by that freshness of tint which a short walk before breakfast will, in fine weather, almost invariably bestow on the young lady who is wise enough to take such exercise. She was tall, but very delicately formed, with slight features, small hands, and absurdly small feet, as a tiny slipper, peeping out beneath her morning robe of pink muslin, testified. Her brown hair, which, in spite of all Aunt Mabel's labour and devices, persisted in following the bent of nature, and curling up too high, was dressed in ringlets; but the ringlets were looped behind her little ears, so that one could the better see the long lashes and

soft light of her arch, merry eyes, and the smiles of her roguish lips.

Sir Everard spoke in a loud voice, and with an amount of gesticulation that in this refined generation would not be tolerated; and when he brought his orations to a close, he would sometimes give emphasis to his words with a clap of his hand on the table and an unmistakable oath. Sir Everard was not better than his neighbours; and it being then the fashion for gentlemen to swear when they were either angry or amiably enthusiastic, he gave in to the custom; but, a strange thing in his day, he was too polite a man to shock, under ordinary circumstances, a lady's ear with rough language,—and, stranger thing still, his daughter was to him a lady,—to be treated with chivalric respect as well as fatherly tenderness.

Of course the case is all altered now; but when George the Third was king, men who prided themselves on their courtly demeanour to the fair sex, and who never let slip an opportunity of paying homage to a friend's wife, did not always feel it incumbent on themselves

to treat the women who surrounded their hearths with even common civility. They would not unfrequently snarl and growl at their wives, and rate their daughters with unseemly violence,—in terms that no man in his senses would apply now-a-days to a careless cookmaid. Such manners have long ere this vanished from English society; and we are, without exception, models of amiability in our domestic circles,—always considering the feelings of others; never selfishly giving way to ill-humour; never roaring, unless it be with the gentleness of the sucking dove. But, forty or fifty years since, before Mrs. Ellis wrote her admirable works, this billing and cooing did not so universally exist; and we only advert to the painful fact in order that the reader may know of one particular in which Sir Everard was before his age.

He was of so gentle a nature, that to behave with gentlemanly feeling was with him an unchangeable, unconscious habit—not an effort so exhausting to him when he was in society, that he was compelled in private life to refresh himself with outbursts of irritability.

"'Tis all nonsense their complaining of the poor people. They starve them, insult them, goad them into hating their betters; and then, when the poor brutes sneak out under the cover of darkness, and bag a few head of game, 'tis all put down to the immorality of the lower orders! Fudge! 'tis all —— nonsense!"

"Really, sir, you must forget I'm in the room," put in Lucy with the prettiest possible air of astonishment. "I declare, sir, you are growing as bearish and insufferable as Mr. Bernie, who apparently thinks a girl's ears were only made to be stunned with such expressions as 'Fudge! 'tis all'—shall I complete the quotation, sir?"

"My dear,—my dear Luce," cried the old man, half in contrition, and half in fear that his high-spirited daughter would continue the repetition of his words, "you know 'twas only a slip of the tongue."

"No such thing, sir; I fear 'tis not a slip, but a habit we are talking of. Have you a table of bad language? How many slips go to a habit? 'Twas only yesterday, as you dropped me at the door after our drive, you

gave me a specimen of your readiness to S, W, E, A, R!"

"By Jove! you little vixen," laughed Sir Everard, "you'll keep your husband in order, when you get one. And there's not a particle of justice in you! You remember, as well as I do, that yesterday I didn't say a single word to Thomas about the abominable state of the harness till you had crossed over the threshold. And if you didn't take the proper precaution of shutting the hall-door, why—'twas your own fault."

"There, dear, say no more about it," said Lucy, putting a cup of tea before her sire. "I see you are sorry, and will never do so any more—for ever and a day. So give me a kiss for the tea, and another for forgiving you."

These salutes having been given and returned, and Sir Everard having smoothed his white moustaches, just to assure himself that they had not been kissed away, the father and daughter paid for a few minutes more attention to the furniture of the breakfast-table than to any other subject.

"Let's see, Luce," resumed the baronet, "what's the day of the month?"

"Oh, dear sir, I am ashamed of your affection!"

"Simple truth, Luce," answered the father with a smile of childlike frankness; "I have been thinking so much about it, that I have confused myself. If to do it would pay old Costerton his mortgage, I could not tell you how many days there are till 'the first.'"

"When I was a good little girl, sir, and said lessons of all sorts of useful knowledge to Aunt Mabel, I learnt—

'Thirty days have September,
April, June, and November;
All the rest have—'"

"Confound it! I know all that. Don't go on. You'll make a page of it to worry me."

"Then, in mercy, to put you out of your suspense,—I inform you that the first of September will be here in six days."

Only six days!

Very pleasant news that for a sportsman

who loved field-sports—even as an English gentleman under every condition of education, climate, or fortune, invariably loves them! Sir Everard rubbed his hands with delight. The experience of a long life had not taught him to enjoy summer. At the best he only tolerated it as a kindly arrangement on the part of nature to let women and water-colour artists get their share of pleasure out of existence!

The prospect of enjoyment that lay before him caused him to mollify towards the hard landlord who, a few minutes before, had been proclaimed to be justly punished in having his estate rifled of game by the poachers just before the shooting season.

After all, Manthorpe was not such a bad man, and should be invited to have a bang at the Adenbroke partridges. And, on consideration, Sir Everard did not believe the poachers were dwellers on Manthorpe's estate. Doubtless, they were a gang of fellows from London. Not that he was going to make out Londoners to be naturally scoundrels, more than any other class of Englishmen. No, no, he was not so

uncharitable as that! Only it was but too certain that in London there were hosts of revolutionary fellows over from Paris, disseminating the most abominable doctrines, and corrupting poor ignorant people who wished with all their hearts to lead honest lives. And Sir Everard having thus pushed off the obloquy of a poaching raid, which had lately scandalized the whole neighbourhood, to that pleasant city which our grandfathers were in the habit of regarding as ‘the devil’s drawing-room,’ the worthy gentleman once more directed his attention to his breakfast.

Scarcely had he done so—when a servant entered, and put the post-bag before the master of the house. The arrival of the bag was an event of considerable interest in the daily life of the High House. It was a rare thing for it to come to the breakfast-table empty. Lucy raised her eyes quickly, and turned them, not without a shade of crimson running through her fair face, to the square leathern case, brass-bound and padlocked. Her father took a key from his waistcoat pocket, and turned it in the

lock. He had performed that operation some thousands of times in his life, with a great variety of emotions, sometimes with a joyful expectation or a sense of pleasant, though every-day, excitement, but quite as often with a vague feeling of anxiety and a hurried determination to know the worst,—in fact, with sensations similar to those which a man about to undergo a dangerous operation experiences, or those which some of the writer's friends inform him they feel when they hear a postman's rap, or, worse still, a single rap—at the outer doors of their chambers.

"Pah!" cried Sir Everard, contemptuously, pitching the one solitary letter the bag contained over to his child, "only that thing! Well, anyhow, Luce, I am glad it is for you."

Any observer might have seen that the inquiry—timid, half-anxious, wishful—of Lucy's eyes had been satisfactorily answered. The quickness with which she seized her prize, and then—to make the most of her treat—examined the post-marks and direction, before proceeding to the interior, would have communicated her

secret to any spectator not previously in possession of it.

“Papa, have I your leave to read it now?”

“Lord bless me! yes, to be sure, child. Don’t mind me,—I’ll go and get my newspaper,” replied Sir Everard, huskily, and with a tetchy tenderness of manner.

CHAPTER II.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

SIR EVERARD had at no period of his life been much of a student. When his scholarly acquirements were at their highest, he would have been unable to satisfy the educational tests of the Civil Service Examiners. Indeed, judged by the standard of our own exemplary and highly intellectual times, in which to spell ‘weather’ without an ‘a’ is a disqualification for the Queen’s service, he was a very ignorant and ill-educated old gentleman. Yet he was not altogether without literary pursuits. Almost daily he read his sporting paper and his Bible,—the former because it amused him,

and the latter because, in the sincere devotion of his simple nature, he believed that it was able to do him good.

It so happened that he had already perused every line of the current week's instalment of sporting news; but so that his child might not be disturbed in her enjoyment by his sitting apparently without occupation or pastime of any kind, he took up his thrice-read paper from the side-table, and pretended to be absorbed in its columns.

In the mean time Miss Lucy was buried in her letter.

It was one of a common sort. All of us, men and women alike, have had many such. Brother of mine! can't you go to your desk and find packets of them? You are a methodical person, and never mislaid such documents in your life;—(lucky for some people if they could say as much!) There they lie, numbered 1, 2, 3, tied in bundles, dated, and docketed with the guilty persons' names, like promissory notes in the drawers of a money-lender's table,—like some of such notes, also, in being overdue and worthless. How exactly any one of

them resembles all the rest! 'Tis lucky they are signed and endorsed, for otherwise you wouldn't know which was Julie's and which Annette's. And yet the time was when the two birds seemed to pipe such different tunes. The blue paper is blue still, and the white is white, and the pink has not turned green, but the sentences sprinkled over the smooth sheets in faint caligraphy seem to have lost the qualities which once distinguished them. What Julie says, Annette vows; and what Annette hopes, Julie longs for.

Oh! that old song of love!—'tis but the repetition of the same half-dozen notes, and 'tis no part of this page to settle the question whether the bird that utters forth the strain is nightingale or parrot.

Women, when their *affaires* are at an end, usually make a great show of returning all memorials of their pleasant folly, and send back rings, trinkets, and *billets-doux* in a manner suitable to feminine dignity; but, if the present writer is not misinformed, they always retain a little something out of the booty. Like spend-thrift sons sending in a schedule of debts to

their fond fathers, they don't enter every item that ought to figure in the bill. The returns are falsified and the income misrepresented. Was the discarded lover ever known who received back *all* he gave—every single book, letter, glove, or flower? What a medley for a rejected suitor to console himself with!

Of course, women, when they marry, don't store such unsurrendered spoils in secret places away from all eyes but their own. They know too well, and obey too honestly, the dictates of conjugal duty to have recourse to such deception. But it is otherwise with men. They keep old love-letters and tokens. If such treasures are demanded back by their writers or givers, the majority of them have been, it is replied, committed to the flames; but half a century afterwards they are found by the curious eyes of another generation in square parcels, each marked 'only a woman's love-letters,'—or, if the memento be such as Swift guarded, 'only a woman's hair.'

"Father," said Lucy, after reading her letter through, "*he'll* be here on the *first*, if not sooner."

The smile of intense pleasure on her face, as

she said this, avowed what a life of enjoyment she felt was about to come to her from *his* visit. The time was, madam, when you did not look quite so far into the future as you do now,—when you did not care to strain your eyes to catch a glimpse of the distant parting through the meeting near at hand,—and when you were never anxious about the third week so long as there was a fortnight of gladness before you. Say,—were you not a happier woman in the old days of short views, ere you had learnt how to utilize your affections, and trained Hope to amble with artificial paces?

“Then, by Jove! Lucy, he shall go out shooting every day that he is with us.”

“Oh, sir, you forget—he won’t have a licence.”

“Fudge, girl! I have still got a little cash in the locker; and I’ll get him one by the time we see him.”

“You misunderstand me, sir,” answered the saucy child with the merriest possible pertness; “he won’t get a licence from me. He is not coming here to shoot partridges and walk over acres of muddy ground, but to ——”

Lucy paused and hesitated.

There was, however, little need for her to finish her sentence.

Sir Everard saw her meaning, and with blunt frankness exclaimed in a tone of triumph, as if a discovery and an apt criticism upon it had flashed upon him in the same moment, "And I'll be shot if you're not in the right;—and I don't know where he would find a prettier pair of lips for the purpose!"

"Shall I give you some more tea, sir?" asked the young lady, demurely, and with something of severity in the expression of the flattered lips. "I must leave you in a minute or two. Aunt's head-ache is worse this morning, and she'll be in want of me."

"Nay, nay, stay awhile. Sister Mabel will spare you to amuse me. (What is there that she would not deny herself to make me or any other living being happier?) Don't be angry with your old father's garrulous tongue. Let us talk about *him*.

"'Tis such an uninteresting subject of conversation," responded Lucy, wicked again, but in another way.

Let something be said about *him*.

The Rev. Hugh Argentine, the *he* in question, was a curate fixed on what was termed a cure, because it was utterly impossible for him to cure it.—The cure was a vast parish on the east side of London, the inhabitants of which were equally divided into those who hated all forms of religion alike, and those who cherished a peculiar animosity to the Established Church. Enormous factories, producing luxuries for the consumption of the wealthy, and cheap necessities to be bought by the poor ; a desert of workshops, in which the sinews of our national greatness were forged and wrought, ruled over by a few gigantic capitalists, and dwelt in by tens of thousands of slaves who (without any particular person being especially in the wrong, without any fault of their own, but simply because they were the slaves of moral infirmity, or mental weakness, or physical imbecility, or some other sort of unkind fortune) passed their lives in toil and poverty, alternate,—at war with the rich man, because they knew his pride ; at war with the poor one, because they knew his selfishness ; indignant with ‘the social sys-

tem, because they had been educated only to see the points of it which pressed cruelly upon themselves ; incapable of loving, because they had never known anything that was worthy of being loved ! Such was the pleasant place in which Hugh Argentine found himself stuck down—a curate, with a magnificent salary of one hundred and twenty pounds per annum !

Hugh had been left an orphan when he was only sixteen years of age. His father was the impoverished representative of an old family which had for centuries lived, side by side, in the power of wealth and friendship, with the Adenbrokes. The failings of a generous race ran in the blood of this same father. He might have enriched his soil with the hundred thousand pounds of a brewer's heiress, but with a perversity and imprudence (which caused many of his friends to say it was no use pitying such a man) he married a lady of less family, less beauty, less wit, and no fortune at all,—a lady indeed with no single recommendation, except that he loved her. It would be too much to say that his decision was a foolish one. Possibly he enjoyed his life in his quiet parsonage,

with a cellar of good port, a tolerable hunter, a decent library, and a dozen congenial friends, more than if, as the proprietor of a county hall, he had kept hounds, contested a rotten borough, visited Bond Street every season.

When his father died, Hugh was sixteen years of age,—tall, well-grown, handsome, and with a certain studious habit of mind, though no amount of education would ever have made him a profound scholar. At first he declined entering any one of the learned professions. No, he would not hide the virtues of his form and mind in a sable robe. Any colour would dye black ; and there was more than enough tawdry calico in the human rag-fair to undergo that process. With a thousand pounds (his sole inheritance), an old name, and a high heart, what better or more imprudent thing could he do than enter the army ?

He consulted two friends,—Sir Everard, who was his guardian and his father's executor; and his uncle, Mark Cudworth, his mother's only brother, an old man who had never either had a child or a heart to love one with,—a keen-eyed, cold-blooded old merchant in Mincing

Lane, who having, by seventy years' hard work, knavery, self-denial, and dogged determination, raised himself from a clerk's stool, with a salary of £60 a-year attached to it, to the possession of more than £200,000, found himself with only two sources of pleasure left to him in the world,—the contemplation of his ledgers and account-books, and indulgence in whisky-and-water;—the latter of which tastes he rarely gratified—because it cost money to do so.

Two such advisers as Sir Everard and Mark Cudworth were not likely to agree. The former patted Hugh on the back, and declaring that the army was the only profession fit for a gentleman, swore by Mars that the boy should fight his way into the House of Peers. The latter wrote a dry letter to his nephew, told him not to make a fool of himself, and offered to give him a first-rate opening into the alkali trade. Hugh's decision was as imprudent as—in consideration of his years some readers may say—it ought to have been. He threw aside his Mincing Lane prospects, as if they had been a suit of old clothes ; and, ere a few weeks had passed over his head, was an ensign in a marching regiment.

While he was waiting for his commission, he took up his residence at Sharsted High House,—riding one of Sir Everard's horses well up to the hounds ; vowing eternal friendship to Reginald, Sir Everard's heir, a lad his senior by a few years, but in respect of style and views of life just a match for him ; and possibly already having a vague dream of what a pleasant madness it would be one day to fall in love with Lucy Adenbroke, then a little miss of some twelve summers.

When Hugh's knapsack was packed, Fortune omitted to put a field-marshall's baton in it. His share in the fag-end of Peninsular campaigning brought him neither honourable mention in a Gazette, nor the distinction of a wound, nor even a step of promotion ; and when Waterloo was fought, and he had won out of that bloody contest a gash on the left cheek and his lieutenancy, the game was finished, and the tables were closed.

Hugh returned to England without one of his thousand pounds left, and with no hope of advancement in his profession. Mark Cudworth behaved very civilly to him, was sorry he

hadn't had better luck, and advised him to sell out, and try his hand at something that paid better. The youngster acted on the advice, sold his commission, and paid his debts with the proceeds, after which act of honesty he found himself without a penny in his pocket. When old Mark was informed of the state of his nephew's finances, he urged the young man to go down to Sharsted and spend a few weeks with his guardian ; and to accelerate his movements, he presented him with a deep sigh, and a note for no less a sum than five pounds.

When Hugh arrived at the High House, and told Sir Everard of his uncle's liberality, the worthy baronet nearly died with laughter. Such stinginess was so unlike Sharsted hospitality, and all that Sir Everard had thought possible in human nature, he could only look upon it as a magnificent touch of comedy. Perhaps Hugh thought it more closely resembled tragedy. Anyhow, a change came over him. He was disappointed, but not embittered. Because luck had persevered in running against him, he did not think it necessary to rail at all human institutions as corrupt,

and deem human nature abominable. He could not well do so, in a household where he was treated with more delicate consideration than he had ever experienced in his whole life before. Lucy took long walks and drives with him, and behaved to him with sisterly frankness and attention; and Aunt Mabel, Sir Everard's spinster sister, who presided over the domestic arrangements of the High House, gave him that comfort which gentlewomen know best how to bestow on a downcast man.

"You must keep a good heart, Hugh," said the aged maiden, with a kind of maternal tenderness. "You may not have a gloom settle on your face, or Lucy won't like to ride about the country with you so well as she does now."

"I have something to be sad about, 'Aunt Mabel,'" replied Hugh, rousing himself from a fit of solitary dejection in which the lady had caught him.

"Yes—for five minutes at a time, but not longer. You mayn't be continually dwelling on the present, but looking out into the future. You're young—not more than four-and-twenty;

you can do something besides ride fox-hunting; you've more than the ordinary share of wits. Have you forgotten all about Latin and Greek?"

Hugh was forced to smile.

Aunt Mabel was usually so reserved and silent, that he was startled by her boldly entering on such a conversation. Perhaps, too, boy-like, he had fallen into the vulgar error that old maids care about nothing so much as cats and their own infirmities.

"I know how to spell my name, and read a Greek play," answered the young man, with a blush.

"To be sure you do," replied Aunt Mabel, encouragingly; "and you must be making use of your wits. You must have a profession. Be ordained, child, and go into the church;—you'd make a good clergyman. For half-a-dozen years you might be a poor curate, but one day you'd be sure to get a living. There are friends of the old Argentines to be found everywhere. And who knows but that one of these days your old miser of an uncle will leave you all his money?—Bless me, you've no reason to be downcast about the future."

"I declare, Aunt Mabel, you make me feel as if you spoke the truth."

"Speak the truth! I should think I do," continued the old lady, cheerily. "If it suited my humour to tell fortunes, I should sing a pretty song to you now. Why, it won't be many years before you'll fall in love with a pretty girl, with a sunny face, and wonderful dark ringlets, who'll put her little hand in yours, and whisper something in your ear that'll make her happier as she says it than you as you listen to. I know I'm right, Hugh. And she won't be a fool for making such a choice;—for I have known you, Hugh, ever since you were a little tottering urchin, and I used to nurse you in my lap, and think what a happy woman I should be if I had such a babe of my own to take to my desolate arms. God bless you, Hugh!"

Hugh felt a swimming in his head. A dimness also came over his eyes, and when he had quickly brushed them, so that he could again see clearly through them, he beheld some tears trickling down the old lady's face. But they speedily disappeared, when Hugh kissed her

hand, and in a few awkward sentences thanked her for all her goodness to him,—saying, that her affection had stood to him in the place of a mother's love, and assuring her that he would consider well her advice.

This strange interview took place in the white parlour; and when it was over, as the window was open to admit the soft air of a summer evening, Aunt Mabel, without much difficulty, stepped into the garden, and seeing the drapery of her niece's dress under a copper beech at the other side of the lawn, called out, “Lucy, Lucy—you must have your walk, or I shall have you on the sick list again. Here is Hugh waiting to accompany you.”

In a few minutes, Hugh and Lucy were walking over the park in the direction of the setting sun, which was sending a flood of soft glory down on the trees and grass-land; and Aunt Mabel stood at the window of the white parlour, looking at the pair, happy in her unselfish kindness,—hopeful for others, and so quite forgetting that she had ceased to hope for herself.

Hugh had long been in love with Lucy; but

had it not been for Aunt Mabel, he would not have made the girl an offer. He would have deemed it dishonour to wheedle a young child into sharing his poverty, and would have gone on his lonely way,—as many a good fellow is going the way of life now,—forcing himself to feign carelessness of old hopes, but ever in his silent thoughtfulness knowing that they dwelt in the depths of his heart, not to be replaced by others.

But Aunt Mabel's words made the whole question assume a different aspect, and that evening's walk altered the case yet more. For ere they came back to the walls of the High House,—in the quiet twilight, under the sombre whispering canopy of an old chesnut-avenue, Hugh had blundered out a spasmodic cataract of entreaty and interjection, that was totally unlike the hundred and fifty magnificent speeches he had, during sleepless nights, determined *never* to make the young lady, under any imaginable force of temptation; and Lucy, unable to say either 'yes' or 'no,' to these absurd demonstrations, had nestled, triumphant and frightened, close to her lover, and offered no

opposition when he seized the kiss which successful lovers have, from time immemorial, regarded as their privilege.

Had Hugh been a colonel of a regiment, it is just possible that old Sir Everard would have sworn that his girl should not marry a man who had only a professional position and income, and no private estate. He would most likely have talked incessantly about all the suffering and degradation to which he had been subjected by a badly supplied purse, and, swearing that no child of his should mate with a beggar, would have acted for about the space of six weeks the part of an overbearing domestic tyrant. But Hugh's ill-luck in his first start in life made it impossible for the generous guardian to reflect on his want of fortune. To have seen the impetuous old man clap Hugh on the back, shake him by the hand, and vow that he would rather have him, without a penny in his pocket, for a son-in-law, than any nobleman with twenty thousand a-year, would have made a prudent *paterfamilias* think himself in the presence of an amiable maniac.

There was rejoicing that evening in the High

House, as if a brilliant stroke in the way of worldly advancement had been made. Aunt Mabel laid her head on her pillow with almost as much gladness at her heart as Lucy experienced on her sleepless bed—where she had no wish to sleep. And if Sir Everard woke the next morning without a twinge of gout, his immunity from pain was not in consequence of having shared with Hugh an enormous bowl of punch on the previous evening.

Hugh is not the hero of this tale, for the tale, being a true reflection of the world, is without a hero. He was a well-conditioned, frank, generous fellow, not altogether void of selfishness, and capable, under provocation, of acting like all other men—pettily and vindictively. The earth contains many like him, though Lucy would have perjured her pretty lips till they were scarlet as capsicums in maintaining the reverse. He would much rather have had a well-furnished house, two thousand a-year, and a stable stocked with a few good hunters, than have entered into the priesthood for a morsel of bread. To be a country squire, with a good income, and a wife, would have been much

more to his taste than starving and toiling on a Rotherhithe curacy. He was not born a philanthropist any more than he was born a poet. And even under the circumstances which made him stand forth as a humble benefactor of his species, he never deluded, or attempted to delude, himself with assurances that he had found a vocation exactly suited to his mind.

It was settled that he should take orders, with the prospect of claiming Sir Everard's daughter as his wife, when any piece of preferment fell to his lot, the emoluments of which, together with a modest allowance which the baronet resolved he would squeeze out of his straitened finances, would enable a young couple to live in not positively painful indigence.

Certainly all the parties to this arrangement were sufficiently romantic people; but no one can blame them for that who looks out on the world, and sees how well persons who are spoken of as 'foolish—yes, wickedly imprudent!' get on in the struggle of life, animated by hope, and rescued again and again from starvation by feathered messengers of the air. They none of them—not even Aunt Mabel,

whose experiences had been little favourable to hopefulness—had a fear that ‘waiting for an income’ would prove a far from agreeable process to the young lovers.

Sir Everard, in his hearty way, was sure something would soon turn up;—he’d stir himself, do what he had never done in all his life before—court the favour of a great man, and pay a visit to the Lord-Lieutenant of the county, to see if he could get a promise of the next of his lordship’s livings, that fell vacant. And Lucy was for several months too excited to think what ‘waiting’ meant, or to feel a shiver in her nerves as the words ‘hope deferred’ sullenly fashioned themselves out of empty air, and smote on her ear.

Hugh, too, was sanguine that the period of expectation would not be long. Anyhow, he was resolved that it should not be a time of inaction. He wisely determined not to loiter listlessly about a country parish, longing for brighter days, but to find pastime in constant employment and beneficent exertion until he should be able to settle down in his old county—a rector, as his father was before him. Per-

haps, too, in the young man's mind, superadded to a soldier-like relish for 'duty' and 'active service,' was a vague, romantic hope, that if he worked in the trenches manfully—never shirking night-work, or danger, or physical privation—his merit would be discerned by those who were able to reward it.

So Hugh entered on his humane and unattractive labours,—honestly proclaiming the doctrines of religion to hordes of poverty-stricken blasphemers and drunkards (who persisted in regarding his polished manners as demonstrations of pride, and his inability to scatter money on the floor of every garret he entered as hateful stinginess); telling poor outcast women where there was hope, even for them; and teaching ragged children in noisome kennels to fold their hands and pray to their Father who is in heaven. The army of good men, who are so employed at the present time, do not forget the pioneers of forty years since who preceded them.

In such manner did Hugh make the best of untoward circumstances.

The world has many like him, patiently and

cheerfully doing their duty in unlovely places,—not repining at their conditions of life, but not disguising from themselves that they hope, sooner or later, to have less toil and more enjoyment.

CHAPTER III.

THE LAW OF ENTAIL.

IN spite of her ridicule of Sir Everard's proposition to talk about *him*, Lucy was so much interested in the subject that she deferred her visit to Aunt Mabel, and composed herself for a prolongation of the breakfast-table chat.

“I wish, girl, you would marry directly.”

“I should like to do so, sir.”

“But you see, you can't—without a precious lot of money.”

“The licence wouldn't cost much.”

“But the consequences would. By Jove, it's all very well to say ‘sufficient unto the

day is the evil thereof!'—and so 'tis, *quite enough*,—and the evil that comes in the future tacked on to to-day's is a good deal more than enough! At the outset, 'doing a bill' seems profitable and pleasant work enough, Lucy; the paper doesn't trouble you much at first,—but 'tis the renewing it, and keeping the interest down, that's the devil!—But you know,—I can't help it."

"Help what, sir?"

"Why—your not being able to marry."

"Of course, I know that, papa," responded the girl heartily,—“don't trouble your dear old head, and good kind heart, about it. Don't —there's a dear old man. We can wait. Why, if we wait two years longer—we shall—still be quite young.”

The tone of doubt in which the six concluding words of this speech were uttered was so droll, that Sir Everard was forced to smile, though, if the truth be told, some reflections suddenly flashed upon him,—as painful reflections will, without notice, and without any fair excuse for their unpleasant intrusion—that made him more inclined for tears than laughter.

He had been throughout life an easy-tempered man, allowing, as it is ordinarily termed, things to take their course,—that is, the wrong course; lending money that could never be returned, and borrowing money that had always to be repaid; pushing off disagreeable subjects to an ever-receding day of final settlement; and in a thousand and one ways muddling away a property which, though small at the commencement, might, under good management, have become very valuable. Year after year he had gone on, saying ‘it would all come right in the end;’ and now, when he had almost reached an end which was just the reverse of right, he felt a deep sense of overthrow and disappointment.

Sir Everard had come into possession of Sharsted early in life, on the death of his father. Till he was nigh forty he had been in the army,—conspicuous on the turf, distinguished in the best hunts of the kingdom, and popular in the best sets of military society. He was in those days a remarkably athletic and dissipated man,—but he was so free from every taint of four-in-hand coarseness, and possessed such fresh-

ness of complexion, and voice, and laugh and manner, that none but those who knew him intimately were able to credit the stories that were told of him. With wine or without wine, he was the same cool-headed, jovial, gentleman. He was the man to do anything that was dare-devil or adroit,—to ride desperate steeple-chases, or successfully prefer his addresses to the fair sex under any and every combination of difficulties. He must have been a very clever fellow naturally, for though he lived in society that utterly beggared the wealthiest nobles, he steered clear of absolute ruin; and it is equally certain that he was endowed with a good disposition, for though during twenty years he was surrounded by sharpers, black-legs, and fashionable parasites, he kept his honour free from all blemish, and could not be brought to think badly of human nature.

To the astonishment of all who knew him, Everard Adenbroke, when he was about forty years of age, disappeared from London society. He married a lovely girl, of a good but necessitous family, and bidding adieu to hells and ball-rooms, set up as a country gentleman at

Sharsted, and for a considerable period resided on his estate the whole year round. The steward, to his dying day, was fond of talking of this part of Sir Everard's life;—of the talents for business which the baronet displayed for awhile, and of the improvements which he introduced in the management of his estate. The steward would tell also how in those days his master was allowed by every one to be the best farmer as well as best landlord in the county, and how Lady Adenbrooke was his companion wherever he went—in the hunting-field as well as at home!

The marriage was a very happy one; but for five years it was childless, at the expiration of which time, the boy Reginald was born; and then after a lapse of eight years more, Lucy made her appearance. But scarce two hours had she been born in the world, when her mother died, and left a husband widowed of the guidance he stood so much in need of.

It was a bad thing for Sir Everard. He could not any longer dwell at Sharsted in the gloomy winter months,—where every object was a memorial of his dead wife, and when

nothing in nature brought to mind her smiles. Lucy was given into the custody of Aunt Mabel, who reared her as if she had been her own child; Reginald was sent off to Eton; and Sir Everard went up to London. For some years he rarely visited Sharsted. He called his old bachelor friends around him;—most of them were not at all improved by the last fifteen years. Old habits, old pleasures, and old follies came back with the old friends. Of course Everard was miserable in such a life,—but any other mode of existence would have driven him mad. So he went on,—trying to think as little as possible of the best and purest passage of his life, and allowing the incumbrances on his estate, which his wife's prudence and clever management had nearly wiped out, to involve themselves once more to heavy accumulations of debt.

It was not till Lucy had reached her tenth year that he again became a permanent resident at the High House.

A thousand and one times had Sir Everard, in the first days of his widowed life, resolved to lay by a portion for his daughter; but pro-

crastination and temptation in innumerable forms had continually stepped in and delayed performance of the resolution. Then came one or two unlucky acts of imprudence,—and the time had gone, when it was possible for him to retrieve. The fact that his daughter was not provided for had often troubled the father's rest, staring at him in the silent hours of restless nights, and fretting him when he sat in his pew at church, and turned his eyes to the marble memorial of his departed wife. He had tried in vain to quiet his uneasy conscience. He had, at times, comforted himself with an assurance that Reginald would provide for her out of the entailed estate, which yielded an income of twelve hundred pounds a year. And for many a day, whenever he looked in the girl's gentle, lovely face, he gave cheer to his troubled heart by saying that his darling was beautiful enough to wed with the proudest, and noblest, and richest,—without any fortune of her own at all.

But, lo! here she was, waiting to be the wife of Hugh Argentine!

After Sir Everard's smile had passed away,

a look of deep sadness took its place. Lucy saw it; and divining its cause, she endeavoured to dissipate it.

“ Why, dear me, good old papa, you mayn’t be gloomy about the future. What nonsense it is of you! If the worst comes to the worst, I can be an old maid, like dear Aunt Mabel,—and I’m sure, if I am like her, I shall be a much better and more loveable woman than I am now. And I declare I would rather be a simple maiden all my days than see you look so miserable. Come, sir, cheer up and laugh at me.—I had a dream last night that Hugh was to get a living before the end of next year, and what’s more, I dreamt it before midnight—so ‘tis sure to come true.”

“ By —, I hope so,” answered the old man; “ and if not, when I’m gone, Reginald—who is a fine, generous lad, and in all ways just what I was before I grew old and selfish—will do what he can for you. You see, the old house and the land—which is just twelve hundred a year—will be his; they’re entailed, and he must have them,—and, even as far as you are concerned, they could not go better.”

"Indeed, they couldn't, papa. How I wish his regiment might be ordered home from the West Indies! I can't bear to think of that horrible climate."

"You see, that's the beauty of an entailed estate," continued the old man, harping on the painful topic,—"it enables the head of a family always to keep the women and youngsters above water, and at the same time the family name and dignity are sustained. What a sad thing it is when a name dies out! It may seem rather hard on younger brothers, the entail system,—and so it would be deuced hard on them, if they didn't always take good care to have no children; and it's hard also on a man like myself, with two children whom I love equally, and yet can't do what's liberal by either of them. If I had my way, you should share and share alike. But still, beauty, we mayn't leave off hoping. Why, before another month is over, who knows but that infernal old screw, that old scoundrel, Mark Cudworth, will have dropped and left Hugh all his money."

"Papa, papa, I am shocked—I am angry with you. How can you, on such a subject,

suggest such a thought?" cried Lucy, starting up with her soft blue eyes flashing displeasure.

"Child, nonsense—I don't want the old man dead."

"But you think that I harbour the wish. Oh, father, how vile and mean and cold-hearted a girl you must deem me, to imagine that I could calculate upon any advancement that might come to myself from such a catastrophe! —It is too solemn, too awful a subject for such light words!"

There was an earnestness in the girl's words, and in the tone with which they were uttered, that startled Sir Everard, and held him rebuked. He saw that the careless speech, which to his man's rough nature possessed little meaning, had jarred on some delicate fibre of her sensitive nature. Possibly he had struck home to some secret hope cherished in her pure breast,—a hope which with deep shame she knew to have crept into her heart, though she had never dared to scan it, never even dared to acknowledge its existence.

With a hurried apology, the old man begged her to forget what he had said, to be assured

that she had put a too strong—a cruel—an unjust interpretation upon his words. Surely she did not so far mis-understand her father, as to imagine him capable of selfishness from the hatefulness of which she herself started away in affright.

No, no,—she was wrong, foolish, hasty! She acknowledged that she was so.

She was silent for a minute.

During the pause she became calm; but her face was still pale with agitation, and her clear guileless eyes were still burning with emotion, when she came up to Sir Everard (who still remained seated), and taking his right hand in hers, and bending over him, said in clear, soft accents—which he remembered well in after days, when the angel of death was in the house, and his pride was bowed to the dust;—“Father, a little wicked thought soon becomes a great one—a strong tree, of rapid growth, and mighty branches, bearing fruit that is deadly sin. Let us pray not to be led into temptation. Do you remember Pharaoh’s dream?—‘And, behold, there came up out of the river seven well-favoured kine and fat-fleshed; and they fed in

a meadow. And, behold, seven other kine came up after them out of the river, ill-favoured and lean-fleshed; and stood by the other kine upon the brink of the river.. And the ill-favoured and lean-fleshed kine did eat up the seven well-favoured and fat kine.'—Father, the well-favoured kine were the pure, sacred aspirations and pious resolves of a human life, and the seven ill-favoured kine were wicked thoughts—and one such had by itself been able to accomplish the work of destruction!"

For a moment—a moment which seemed to the gazer a long minute—Sir Everard looked up into her searching eyes; and then her gentle, girlish face came down to his. He felt her fresh pure lips touch his forehead; but ere he could say another word she had glided softly from the room.

CHAPTER IV.

VILLAGE FRIENDS.

On quitting her father, Lucy went straight to her room, that she might be alone for a short time.

She wanted to examine her own heart, to see what it was that had so frightened her, to reflect on what she had said to her father. She had been, and still was, agitated with fear,—and, in a slight degree, with anger. What had made her afraid, and roused her indignation?

Her discomfort was not diminished by feeling that she had been hasty to an indulgent father—had been guilty of disrespect to him who had never failed in respect to her. Sir

Everard's life, as the reader knows, had not been altogether void of offence; but Lucy was acquainted only with the best portions of it, and she—capable of covering a bad father, had her sire been such an one, with the beauties of her own goodness, and then loving the creature of her imagination—regarded the old baronet with as much reverence as love.

Her conscience, therefore, was ill at ease when, in the solitude of her private room, she recalled the scene in which she had just acted a part.

But the far greater portion of her trouble was the memory of the thought which, called up by Sir Everard's heedless words, had been the original cause of her disturbance. Truth to tell, it was neither a pleasant nor a new thought. Months—ay, more than a year—ago it had crept, in an idle hour, into her mind, when she first began to look forward, calculatingly as well as hopefully, to the future, and when the novel excitement of ‘being engaged’ had, to some extent, subsided. She had, at the time of which this story is now speaking, been engaged three years;—a short time to those who,

with grey hairs on their heads, have begun to saunter slowly along the quiet lanes and obscure places of life, and see the years flit by them like express trains sent onward to eternity— but a long time to the young, who feel, think, speak, act vividly, have a new emotion with every ticking of the clock, and borne on amid a sweet tumult of joys, untried pleasures, and flashing hopes, find more life in one quick hour than the old can extract from an entire year.

It was only natural, then, that in one of those periods of becalmment, which occur in the happiest years of existence, something of impatience with the outer world for not keeping pace with her inner life should stir in Lucy's mind. And not less natural was it that the spirit of evil, which keeps a hostile watch over each one of us, should seize such a moment to whisper to Lucy that it would be passing pleasant if she could forthwith enter on that Canaan of happiness to which her sight was directed, and that all obstacles in the way of her doing so might be removed by the death of an old man whose wealth gave gladness to

none—not even to himself—and who, from a sordid youth to a yet more sordid old age, had oppressed the needy and helpless.

As soon as she detected herself thinking such a thought, she turned away from it with a sudden spasm of affright, even as a pure girl reading in a book, and unawares coming upon an unclean thought with which a libertine has defiled a white page, turns from it with an instinctive knowledge that it is not to be dwelt upon. And Lucy prayed to God to grant her pardon for entertaining, even for an instant, such an imagination; but though remission of that sin was given to the believing suppliant, the memory of it was not to be obliterated. Lucy looked away from that memory, but she could not annihilate it. In the garden of her mind, amidst beauties of green luxuriant foliage, and sunny lawn, and fragrant blossom—it lay concealed. Lucy knew where it lurked ; and as she took her pastime in that Eden, she visited every nook and corner save the secret spot where it abode.

With that exercise of will by which we rule the world of our hearts, Lucy created a

kind of artificial semi-oblivion on that painful subject ; she knew, but would not think of, the cause why that one spot was always avoided by her. Some of us have more than one such detested corner in our hearts—which we abhor but will not recognise ; which we avoid and yet will not own that we shun. Places they are where noisome reptiles and noxious herbs dwell. There are some whose hearts have no one corner which they dare to contemplate ; who make one fierce, life-long effort to look away from themselves, so that their eyes may not rest upon the fierce monster Remorse, who sits within surrounded by a gloom in which recollections of shame and crime, of broken resolves, of abused powers, and self-wrought anguish can only be discerned.

Had Lucy been endowed with the power of the lady who cherished the sensitive plant in Shelley's fair garden—could she have taken the obscene and unlovely form and borne it away from her own quiet retreat ‘into the green woods far aloof’—she would have done so. But the living thing, which has been admitted into the garden of a human mind, cannot be

forthwith expelled. For awhile it must tarry in the enclosure ; and all that the gardener can do, is to keep it under restraint, confine it to a prison, and, by the exhibition of those strong narcotics with which every human creature is armed for purposes of self-protection, lull it into torpor.

Such an influence had Lucy exercised over her adversary. She had even fallen into a state of repose, as though the serpent were charmed into permanent inactivity, when, lo ! at a moment when she least dreaded such peril, it had risen up from the covert of rank grass beneath which it had lain hid, and, extending on curved neck its angry head, had hissed at her with its accursed tongue.

It would be lost labour too minutely to dissect the mind of Lucy as she recovered composure and self-command in the quietude of her room. It would be profitless to enumerate each operation of thought by which she stilled the storm that raged within her, and bade herself ‘be not afraid.’ For many minutes she sat in a small, low chair, with her hands folded upon her knees, her slight form inclined for-

wards, and the earnest eyes of her gentle out-stretched face gazing fixedly up through the open window into the serene firmament, as though she watched ‘thought folded over thought.’

When she rose from her seat, a quiet smile softened the firmness with which her countenance had been fixed.

Then Lucy Adenbroke remembered her household interests, and wisely determined not to neglect them.

She bestirred herself, and tripped off to Aunt Mabel’s room to inquire after the headache,—and to gossip about Hugh’s letter and visit, and papa’s ridiculous notion that he (Hugh) would like to go out shooting every day.

Aunt Mabel was a little delicate body, to whom feeble health, and physical suffering were constant daily companions. She had a wee white face, full of seams and wrinkles, ploughed in by time and pain ; and her thin lips, and set eyes, and sparse locks did not awaken very joyful feelings in the mind of a beholder. Indeed, there was such manifest good reason for

complaint in the poor lady, that strangers expected to hear a querulous, fretful voice issue from those compressed lips; and querulous tones are such cruel inflictions, that as long as we remain selfish, we shall find it difficult to live on kindly terms with those who torture us with them. But in Aunt Mabel's case strangers were subjected to a most agreeable surprise. She had the sweetest, cheeriest, most musical voice imaginable; moreover, her laugh was not less pleasant; and both voice and laugh she exercised liberally. No one knew her for many days without feeling grateful to her for never giving utterance to the repinings excusable in a confirmed invalid—more especially pardonable in an invalid who, like Aunt Mabel, had other and weightier reasons than bodily suffering for discontent.

Aunt Mabel was an old maid; and in the last generation the lot of an aged spinster was not enviable. Married ladies held 'old maids' cheap—talking of them with commiseration, and then mercifully inviting them, like poor relations, to admire their establishments and equipages,—the banquets and paraphernalia, the

pomp and splendour of their matrimonial elevation.

The men were harder still.

That a woman would voluntarily remain in a single condition, if she could by any means escape from it, they were unable to believe. They would have shrugged their shoulders with incredulity if any one had told them that a lady of their acquaintance was unmarried because she had so high a sense of what was due to her own dignity, and the dignity of her sex, that she could not submit to be the obedient servant of one she could not thoroughly love. And they were merry over a hint that poor Miss Clarissa would never be a bride because her heart was buried in the memory of an old love,—which was nipped in the spring-tide of life, and forbidden by cruel fate to blossom. In the tottering gait, and wasted limbs, and sharp voices, and sunken visages of aged spinsters, these gentlemen saw not the signs of that decay which time and sorrow work in the loveliest and best, but saw the proofs of natural deformity and evil disposition of mind and body. They never paused to commiserate the anguish of young hopes dis-

appointed, young charms slighted, and young poetry turned to bitterness by stern experience. No! The ‘old maid’ had made ‘a failure’ of life,—such a failure as a man makes when he falls short of his aspirations, or cannot succeed in his profession, or becomes bankrupt in commerce. She was unfortunate, and therefore not to be praised ; had won nothing, and had nothing to give, and therefore was not to be wooed. Now-a-days we can hardly believe that such unkindness existed in respectable society. One would search for it in vain in the English homes of this generation. In a ball-room of the present day a young man would blush to be seen eagerly pursuing a young fair girl, and amusing himself in spare moments with a cool supercilious survey of wan and disappointed faces which no arts of the toilette can ever again make young. The possessors of such disappointed faces are in these days invariably treated with consideration. Out of delicate regard to their inability to command homage, an excess of loyal service is rendered to them. Who ever saw them insolently neglected or arrogantly

patronized ? required to please everybody, and be pleased with anything ?

"Beauty," cried Aunt Mabel, "your step is music. Do kiss me."

This was Aunt Mabel's greeting to her niece. The old lady kept to herself the fact that the noise of the opening door had been to her throbbing temples like a blow with an iron bar.

The kiss was given ; and really, as she sat propped up by her pillows, adorned with the daintiest little cap imaginable, and other garniture, that reflected infinite credit on her maid, Aunt Mabel looked far otherwise than an unkissable person. After the kiss Lucy read for Aunt Mabel's benefit some of the best passages from Hugh's letter ;—only *some*, not *all*. A young lady, when she is in love, does not tell even her dearest confidante all that is in her mind. After marriage, the writer of these pages has been told, a different line of conduct is adopted. The 'passages' were in good truth paltry enough. But the two women thoroughly enjoyed them,—Aunt Mabel thinking of her

darling's happiness, and the darling thinking of her own.

"I do wish, Lucy," at last Aunt Mabel said, "that there might come now an end of waiting."

"It would be almost ungrateful in me to say that I wish the same thing. The last three years have been very happy years."

"Ay, child, they have—but that's no reason why it is not time for you to have some still happier."

"I am content to wait."

"But I am not, Lucy.—I am an old woman," answered Aunt Mabel, with a playful smile and a sad tone.—"In a few years' time it will make little difference to me whether you mourn or are merry. I want you to taste the sweetest of your life's happiness, while I am alive to watch you—cheered by it into a more gracious loveliness, and making, by your beauty, every living thing you look on feel your joy to be a part of its own.—Don't laugh at me. I am a foolish, absurd, romantic old maid!"

"Dear Aunt," pleaded Lucy,—gravely, and yet with the lively earnestness of a child beg-

ging an important favour, “don’t teach me to be impatient. Perhaps I want encouragement, more than you think, to keep a quiet heart in me, and not to fret at having to—to—endure delay. Don’t you remember, dear, when I was a little thing, that if you promised to take me out with you for a visit, I could not sleep at night—or learn my lessons by day, because I longed so for the treat?”

The truth of this brief speech, the simplicity with which it was made, and the fact to which it pointed, caused it to strike home to Aunt Mabel’s heart. In that centre of a loving nature the good little soul began to charge herself with selfishness in not considering poor Lucy’s trials more, and her own trials less. But she put none of this self-accusation in words. She only drew the beautiful girl closer to her, and performed sundry demonstrations of unreasonable affection for, and pride in, her. Then suddenly becoming aware that Lucy’s soft face was paler than it ought to be, Aunt Mabel, in a most imperious fashion, ordered her off for a walk, to hunt for a brighter colour.

To obey Aunt Mabel was a law of Lucy’s

life. She ran riot with her father, with an affectation of petulance and wilfulness which it was charming to witness. Indeed, Sir Everard had more than once threatened to proclaim martial law, and shoot her as a rebel. But three gentle words, a look, or a nod from the delicate gossamer of an old lady reduced this petted child from a state of the wildest mutiny; —and the beauty, lowering her head, turned it in whatever direction she was ordered.

So ere ten more minutes were ticked out by the old clock, that had stood in the hall for many long years, clothed in grotesquely-carved oak, and telling the most astounding falsehoods about the time of day, Lucy was in the garden dressed in a walking costume that was suited to the mildness of the season.

It was a glorious day—not very hot, though the August sun was out. It was a cheerful, pleasant noon tide,—pleasant to the pigeons that sat on the roof of the High House, in orderly rows, pouters, tumblers, carriers, capuchins, and fantails, musing on their pedigrees, and all of them ready to swear they had no common ancestor in *Columba Livia*; pleasant to the

huge black cedars, clamped at intervals, up to the very summit, with massive bands of iron; pleasant to the old peacock that walked with stately strut up the terrace, flattering himself that, though his breath was short, his plumage was as splendid as ever; pleasant to the bright gaudy flower-beds,—pleasant to the avenues of beech, and walnut, and chestnut, that crossed each other in the park,—pleasant to the purple hills, from whose wooded sides sparkling rivulets meandered, and danced, and rippled,—pleasant to the wide extended plains of the beautiful country.

Lucy exchanged a few words with old Andrew Staplecroft, the gardener. She told him that Mr. Argentine was coming on the first day of the next month, and would expect to find the garden in a superb state of brilliance; at which information Andrew's eyes sparkled, and he expressed himself to be 'right hearty glad to hear on't.' Then Lucy crossed over the lawn, and by a side gate entered the park. Another minute, and she was secure from the sun's rays, under the canopy of the great avenue, by the kindly protection of which she

could walk straight on, under shade, into the village of Sharsted. If she had been somewhat depressed on first leaving the High House, the soft cheering air, and the tranquil whispering of the boughs overhead, and the agreeable anticipations of approaching pleasure that occupied her heart, soon altered the tone of her mind;—and she walked on blithe and joyous, as we may well wish all maidens, high or humbly born, to be. Foolish girl, as she passed one particular tree,—an enormous fellow, with a big, gnarled, knotted trunk, and a rude seat cut in it—just, but only *just*, big enough to hold two persons,—she blushed triumphantly, as if a whole court of nobles were then admiring her. She went close up to the tree; and (on his honour, the writer of these pages saw her do it) kissed the wrinkled, lichenous rind that covered its great old English heart. Some pleasant recollections had manifestly come over her. Possibly it was the tree under which Hugh had—had—had—made his offer to her.

Lucy had a little basket in one of her hands, containing eggs for a friend—Nurse Vincent—on whom she was going to call. Lucy

always kept her old nurse supplied with eggs laid by the High House fowls; and in the same way, Nurse Vincent, who had a rare breed of poultry, repaid the young lady with village eggs.

At least twice a week, Lucy was sure to find her way to the village with a gift and a few kind words for a poor neighbour,—not doing so, however, out of any notion that she was displaying an eminently Christian spirit, or behaving prettily, or fulfilling woman's mission. The simple fact is, that Lucy found her way into poor people's houses because she liked them, and they were glad to see her. As to any thought of condescension on her part, and that she was a very magnanimous girl to set aside considerations of rank, and have intercourse with her social inferiors,—such a fancy never came into her head. They were her friends, whose society was quite as pleasant and necessary to her, as her's was to them. As to the question of rank, Lucy was herself of too high birth and position to think about the birth and extraction of others. She liked her village friends because they were such nice,

agreeable, entertaining people; and she did her utmost to please them,—just as she did her best to gratify the county ladies of her circle,—just as her humble friends did their best to please her. To some readers it may be shocking to hear that Lucy never tried ‘to do the poor good’ by prating, and sermonising, and tract-distributing. She was, indeed, too, a modest young lady to deem herself capable of being an efficient guide to others in spiritual matters. Of course she did not reject any confidence which her friends liked to place in her; but as soon as their out-pourings turned on sin and shame, and the solemn declarations of the Bible, Lucy mistrusted her own powers, and advised that the clergyman of the parish should be sent for.

In these days ladies manage their intercourse with the poor in another, and much higher way. They do not (as Lucy did) seek in their parochial visitations their own pleasure, but ‘the amelioration of the lower orders.’ With this view they enter (let it be frankly and approvingly acknowledged) the dwellings where squalid poverty, and vice, and disease, poison

the air, and make the eye ask mercy of the light of day. As a rule, however, they do little good, because the unhappy wretches they visit don't understand them, or care for them (save for what, like mendicants, they can get out of them), or welcome them. "But," suggests some one, "they do good to themselves."

That's the worst of it.

Too often these charitable intruders into the beggar's garret and workman's cabin do so much good to themselves, that all through life an over-weaning sense of that goodness prevents their seeing the good which exists in others. Their system of action has also another bad consequence. Visiting—systematically and *notoriously* the habitations of the vicious and most unfortunate classes of the poor, they become the reverse of acceptable to the more respectable of the same order. A call from them soon becomes to those on whom it is made, little better than an insult,—being regarded as a sign that poverty has reduced them, in the eyes of the compassionate, to the level of the—(to use the words of a high authority)—the contemptibly poor. A very

different result had Lucy's intercourse with her village friends. As she visited those only of the poor whom she personally loved, and as she naturally was drawn only to the best, it was esteemed in Sharsted a high honour to be on the list of her acquaintance. The cottagers strove to attract her notice by showing themselves possessed of those qualities which they felt would win her affection. And so the gentle girl, selfish with the loveliest form of selfishness, simply by pleasing herself pleased others, and taught others to please,—exercising what may be called 'a moral influence' on the world around her.

In less than ten minutes, Lucy Adenbrooke had reached the end of the avenue, and having passed through a small gate, was standing in front of the Sharsted Traverse. Hard by the Traverse stood the 'Chequers,' the landlord of which cleanly hostel was the same Simon Vincent who, as master of the Traverse, wrought in metals, and shod the horses of the district for six miles round.

Simon was hard at work, hammering away at a piece of iron.

"The morning to you, Miss Adenbroke," said Simon, desisting from his clamorous toil on the appearance of the lady.

"'Tis a hot day for you, Mr. Simon," responded Lucy heartily, calling him 'Mr.', because he had been churchwarden, and was a personage of no small local importance, and addressing him by his Christian name, because she had caught from her father a habit of calling her humble neighbours by their Christian names,—"very hot for your work,—but you seem very cheerful with it."

Simon assuredly did not look otherwise than cheerful. A short, stout, swarthy, jovial fellow, with a neck that made beholders think of a bulldog, he enjoyed the hard work, which kept him out of the jaws of apoplexy.

"You see, Miss Adenbroke," said the honest fellow, pulling his grimed shirt-sleeves over his enormous arms, that would have held their own against a lion's paws, "it's good for me;—that's just what it is. If I'd ha' been born a gentleman, which I am thankful to say I wasn't, I should have had a crowner's quest on me afore I was thirty years old,—whereas I'm now past

forty, and can lift more stones o' flour from the ground with my teeth than any other man the whole country round."

"Then you don't think the Hemslow man, who has challenged you, will beat you at throwing sacks of malt next week?"

"Well, Miss Adenbroke," Simon responded modestly,—colouring a little at this assurance that his strength was a topic of interest at the High House,—"I'll be able to answer you better on that point, come Thursday night. But win or don't win, Miss,—I am sure you and Sir Everard, and Miss Mabel, will believe I did my best."

"And no man can do more than that," put in Lucy;—and then the young lady added, "Dear me, Mr. Simon, do you think if I were your apprentice for a year, I should grow as strong as you? Now, do just give me your heaviest hammer—the very heaviest you have—so that I may try its weight."

To see Simon bring out from his stores an enormous hammer, and, after carefully dusting the handle with his leathern apron, give it with a smile into Lucy's hand; to see her glance at

it with astonishment, and then, after raising it with both of her slight arms, let it fall down with a laugh,—was one of the prettiest sights imaginable.

“Have you heard from the squire lately, Miss?” inquired Simon at the conclusion of this pretty piece of acting.

The squire in question was Reginald Aden-broke.

“Yes—by the last mail. He is quite well.”

“Please, Miss,” continued Simon—with something of timidity in his manner, and an awkward attempt at a bow—intended to give force to his petition, “next time you write, would you be so good as give him a message from me, and say with my duty I’ve just managed to get him a little bull-pup of the breed he asked me to get him one of two year agone? It’s a little beauty, Miss, and it’ll be here to-morrow afternoon, when a friend of mine will bring it from Romsey.”

“What, Mr. Simon!” cried Lucy,—her bright eyes showing how genuinely she was pleased,—“and have you remembered it all this time? Oh, he will be so delighted!”

"Lor, Miss Adenbroke," answered Simon huskily—laying his brawny arms and stout fist down on his anvil, "I'll be bound he has thought about me often—that I'll be bound he has. When one of his horses has gone lame, or when he has wanted any chance thing in the iron way knocked up quite sudden, I know right well the squire has often said—'I wish old Nurse Vincent's son, Simon, was here now.'"

The concluding words of this speech reminded Lucy that it was high time to take leave of Mr. Simon, and pay her respects to his mother.

Nurse lived in a little cottage adjoining her son's house—'The Chequers';—and when the lady lifted the latch, and walked in—a few seconds after her ceremonious rap, she was encountered by a brisk, dried-up, wizen, jolly, antique little woman who was hastening to 'answer the door.'

"Why, lor, Miss Lucy, dear," cried the old lady in a shrill treble of welcome, "I was just sure you'd come to-day. I said to Simon this very morning,—'Now, Simon, my lad,' says I, 'Miss Lucy has not been since a week yester-

day, and it is a fine day and there's no company at the High House—mark my words, now, she'll look up afore night.' And you see I'm right. And you've brought some eggs for me, dear ;—now, that's very good of you, for I'm just out o' eggs. And thank you for that, too, dear."

The cause of this last expression of gratitude was a hearty kiss which Lucy imprinted on the lips of the brisk old woman—who had nursed Lucy's mother in the days of her childhood, and tended her in her dying illness, and watched many a long night with womanly affection by Lucy's bedside.

No *verbatim* report will be given of the conversation that ensued between Lucy and her Nurse, for it was of a very meagre, twaddling sort, about 'the times,' the welfare of sick neighbours, and such other trivial matters,—not at all resembling the brilliant and polished small talk in which Mr. Felix Smoothly indulges, when between the hours of four and seven P.M. he displays his elegant figure in those drawing-rooms of Mayfair and Belgravia, of which he is such a conspicuous ornament.

Indeed, the interview between the young lady and her domestic would not have been mentioned, had it not closed in the following manner.

"Have you heard, Miss Lucy," asked Nurse Vincent, rising as her visitor proceeded to take her departure, "of Mr. Roper's illness?"

"No, Nurse—what is it?"

"Why, Miss, his reverence had another paralysis at nine o'clock—and only six minutes to the quarter past. And they say, dear, his reverence can't get over it."

"Are you sure of this?"

"Sure of it!—Bless you, my dear,—didn't John, the coachman, go off full gallop on the rat-tail horse to fetch Dr. Rabbit? and didn't he, coming back, cast a shoe, and have to call Simon out of his bed—though it was hard on eleven o'clock at night—to put another on? Simon can't bear to have his rest broken, unless the fire-engine is wanted—then he's lively enough. So you see Miss Lucy, that's how *we* have the news."

"Poor old man!—I trust, Nurse, it mayn't be quite so bad with him as you say."

" Well, Miss, he's eighty-four."

" Indeed, that's a great age!"

" And the living is a good one, dear Miss Lucy;—there's many a one would like to have it. Now, how nicely, dear, that would suit Mr. Hugh. And Mr. Bernie—whom it belongs to—hasn't a son to take it, and he was old Mr. Argentine's most particular friend. They tell me it's worth eight hundred pounds a-year. Only think—if Mr. Hugh had it! Then, dear, you'd have done with waiting;—and, Miss Lucy, you must be tired of waiting!"

How long the garrulous old woman would have continued this ill-advised speech, if her young mistress had not stopped her, it is impossible to say; for she was still rattling on, when Lucy said somewhat sharply,

" Fie, fie, Nursey, don't talk so. And mind, don't repeat a word of what you have said to me, to any one—not even to Mr. Simon."

" Well, Miss Lucy, you may be right. O' course we ought not to be counting on dead men's shoes. But, still, dear, when a gentleman does die—and go to bed for the last time, folks will wonder as to who is to have the coat he can

wear no longer. But you may be sure, dear, I shall never speak a word of my fancies to a living soul."

So, without saying more, Lucy Adenbroke kissed the old servant again, and took her departure.

As she retraced her steps, along the avenue, to the High House, she pondered on what had just occurred,—of the intelligence she had received of Mr. Roper's illness, of the insight into gossip of the village, which Nurse Vincent's garrulity had afforded her, and of certain hopes—which it was impossible for the poor girl to do otherwise than entertain. “What could have induced Nursey to speak with such freedom, and so strongly?” she said to herself. “Tired of waiting, indeed;—What do they mean by saying that I am tired of waiting? What right have they to gossip about me in that way? Surely I am not the only girl who is biding her time patiently, and contentedly, and cheerfully, till it may please God to make her as happy as she wishes to be—and hopes to be—and will be! I am sure the good people (for dear old Nursey's pate is not the only one that

has taken such fancies into it) have no good grounds for thinking that I pine and fret about my lot. They never see me pout or cry. My face hasn't lost its colour. And I'm sure I'm often as merry as a grig when I talk to them."

Lucy knew—and yet would not know—that Nurse was right. The words of the faithful attendant kept repeating themselves in her ears. For a while she tried to exclude them. But her efforts were of no avail. Pausing under the murmuring boughs of the huge tree, which a brief while since we saw her treat so lovingly,—and, after a few short moments, taking a place on the rude seat, where, often before, through long—calm—happy summer days she had sate, musing about Hugh,—she fell into a meditative mood,—thinking of the past, and present, and future,—and listening to the words, which the swaying leaves overhead pertinaciously whispered—" You must be tired of waiting."

CHAPTER V.

AUTUMN HOLIDAYS.

LUCY walked off her low spirits. Sir Everard accomplished the same good work by a ride.

When his child left him, rebuked and surprised, he stood for a few minutes musing and discomfited. If he blamed himself for roughness and want of consideration for his daughter's feelings, he also felt an agreeable paternal pride in having a child so pure, and delicate, and good;—a child whose sensibilities needed so much care. He brooded over her womanly excellence, and thought how much she resembled her mother. Then Sir Everard walked to the window, and, startled by the contrast be-

tween the aspect of nature and his own half-sombre contemplations, he exclaimed, “By Jove! I declare the sun is shining.”

To pay honour to the shining sun Sir Everard mounted his thick-set cob—black and bright as a dandy’s boot; soft of coat as a dowager’s velvet; broad and flat across the back as one of the seats of the House of Commons ; and called “Gossamer”—because he was the sturdiest and most massive of the equine race.

Sir Everard ambled through the park into the shady lanes, and ere he had been ten minutes in the saddle, his solemn humour was blown to the winds. At every corner he met a friend. He stopped the butcher—whirling by in the squarest of carts—and asked about the show of cattle the day before, at Marchdown Fair. He told a band of little children to hurry along, or they would be too late for dinner—and he threw the brats half-pence enough to get them dinners for a week. He hailed a buxom servant-girl, as she was getting over a stile, and asked if she had got the place for which Miss Adenbroke had recommended

her. He took a pinch of snuff out of the Wesleyan minister's box, and, with a laugh, asked him, "Why the — he didn't come to church oftener?" The curate of four neighbouring parishes scurried past, walking five miles an hour, to bury an old woman in one parish, visit a sick man in another, and christen a feeble infant in a third. The poor fellow was not held in high esteem in the neighbourhood—partly because he had an impediment in his speech, partly because he had a very numerous progeny (it was feared that the children would not, in process of time, add to the local *prestige* of the 'cloth'), but, principally, because he did an enormous quantity of work for a ridiculously small sum of money, and obstinately persisted in feigning contentment with the lot in life which Providence had assigned to him. Sir Everard was the only cordial friend this Parson Adams had in the entire district; and, on the present occasion, the baronet suggested to the honest curate the propriety of resting at the High House as he returned from his out-lying

parishes. Sir Everard promised to send him home in the ‘High House’ carriage, after he had dined and played a rubber of whist. Scarcely had this invitation been given and accepted, when Mr. Costerton, the banker of Newton Coggs, rumbled by in his britska. But the interview between him and Sir Everard was a very short one. The baronet distrusted the banker; for once, when the former had applied for a loan at the Newton Coggs’ seat of exchange, the latter suggested to his client how easy it would be for him to raise money if he only induced his son (a very trifling request for *such* a father to make of *such* a son) to join with him in cutting off the entail of Sharsted. “Bah!” said Sir Everard, testily, as the britska disappeared, “I wish that fellow would not choke me, in my own roads, with the dust of his wheels. I don’t wish him ill luck, but still I should uncommonly like to give one-half of his money to that poor parson who just now left me, and the other half to Hugh.” And with that benevolent declaration, Sir Everard turned through a gate into a bridle-path, and ambled

on, musing in the sunshine, until he muttered, “That’s all very fine; but, all the same for that,—he shall have a license.”

In accordance with this resolution, when Hugh arrived at the High House there was a license for him as well as a gun.

He did not use them, however, on ‘the First,’ for ‘the First’ was a Sunday. Sorely was Sir Everard tempted to set social usage and Divine command at defiance, and bag his brace (at the least), so as not to have it said that he wasn’t out on the ‘First.’ From Marks-hill, and Sternfield, and Tadworth he heard the reports of guns reverberating amongst the hills. It was beyond belief that they were fired by impatient men of conscientious views, who, though they were bent on not violating the sacred day by the slaughter of game, thought it no sin just to take a smell of their powder. Sir Everard attended church in the morning, and also in the afternoon, but, between the services, he loafed about behind the stables with his gun, and thrice—for no earthly object, save ‘the pure music of it’—he discharged it at the blue heavens. And the

listeners at Marks-hill, and Sternfield, and Tadworth became excited and indignant, and said, "Be hanged, if Sir Everard's keeper isn't banging away at Sharsted." Sunday is not the shortest day in the week; at least, little boys don't find it so. But, oh, what a long, long day to an English gentleman is a Sunday that falls on a first of September!

It would be at variance with the purpose of this brief history to give in detail all the enjoyments of Hugh Argentine's holiday. You, sir, from imagination and recollection can fill up the picture. Through the long vistas of the 'past,' can't you look back to the time when a visit to a jolly family was a heaven of delight? You have more invitations now-a-days, and, when August comes round, you accept the one where you think you'll 'be least bored.' In the old time, when you scarce had a banker's account—much less lands and stock—you were asked for the sake of yourself—your handsome face (yes, sir, you were good-looking once, even in the opinion of men), your merry laugh, your lithe figure, so graceful in the dance, your clear voice, that could

sing to every strain, your jokes (sometimes your *own*), your kind, generous heart (it was a kind heart once). And if you could not come, your inviters were genuinely sorry, for they could then get nothing out of you, except the enjoyment they had in your company. Now out of all that basketful of hospitable entreaties there is not one, the sender of which wouldn't be very glad if you enabled him to say, "Well, that's all right. Old Jackson is not coming. I have done what is civil and polite, and yet shan't be bored with him." Say, wouldn't you like a return of the old days when, instead of being wooed as the rich heiress is wooed, you were loved because you were loveable; when a trip into the provinces made you anxiously compare the rates of coach fares with the contents of your slenderly-stored pocket; and when you were often money-bound for a month at a time at a manor-house, because you hadn't the requisite amount of cash wherewith to tip the servants on leaving.

Hugh's vacation was made of golden days.
It was a holiday of 'the good old sort;' the

sort that, after a certain point in life's calendar, we all leave behind us, together with majestic tragic actors, real poets, sublime orators, and ravishing *prima donnas*.

He went out shooting as a man ought,—knocking his birds over like skittles at Iffley; while Lucy, sitting hard by, on the broad back of ‘Gossamer,’ saw the sport, and didn’t think it necessary to scream and faint at the crack of powder, or the sight of ‘a wounded bird.’ He sang songs in the old dining-room at Sharsted, making the dark wainscot resound again, and the claret-jug, out of mere sympathy, long to empty itself round the table. He sung best, though, in another room, which was furnished with a piano, and where Lucy played the accompaniment. Sir Everard’s guests were charmed with him. Mr. Bernie clapped him on the back, and vowed he was ‘too good for a parson.’ But at this questionable compliment Hugh suddenly became grave, and answered, “No, no, sir. You mean ‘not good enough.’” Old Mr. Bernie stood rebuked; but he liked the young man the better for this demonstration of good principle; and if Mr. Roper would

only have succumbed to the paralysis, which was just then disturbing the lees of his life, Hugh would have been his successor.

Amongst the country folk, too, who paid Sharsted a sight-seeing visit, Hugh made himself popular.

There was very little to be seen at Sharsted, save the picturesque walls and pinnacles of the High House, the cedars in the garden, and the avenues in the park. As for pictures, the place was very poorly off. In one of the parlours, there were two foggy landscapes which Sir Everard religiously believed to be Clades, until he failed in an attempt to convert them into a fresh supply of wine for his cellars. On one of the walls hung an enormous piece of canvas, whereon a pair of swans, a flaming peacock, a vulture, a hawk, and an eagle eyed each other ferociously, and prepared for internecine warfare under the very walls of a mansion of happiness, on the summit of which a pair of colossal doves, with much billing and cooing, congratulated themselves on having nothing to do with the strife below. There were also some very antique and dingy portraits of de-

ceased Adenbrokes—some in armour, some in ruffs, some in slashed doublets, some in crimson coats, some in long blue super-coats, with nankeen continuations. Every fashion of beard and ringlet was to be found under their blackening varnish. Sir Everard's knowledge of these worthies was very hazy and confused. He would point to a cropt Roundhead, and tell you how he was loved by Charles II.; or, directing attention to a brilliant gallant of the Restoration, would gravely assure you that he died in the Crusades. If he had fabricated his pedigree, or imported his family pictures from Wardour Street, he would not have committed such blunders. But though there were no greater curiosities than these in the house, though the upholstery—even to the stair-carpets and drawing-room curtains—was in a very dilapidated state, and had for years past cost Aunt Mabel and Lucy much housewifely consideration and anxiety, the rustics liked to come over to Sharsted and have a stare at the old place. They were welcome—for Sir Everard entertained the ridiculous notion that a great man held his property in trust for the happy-

ness of others, and had no right to do exactly what he liked with his own. So the bowling-green, between the high clipt fences of box, was kept rolled and in good condition for these—these—Sir Everard's successor calls them ‘tag-rag-and-bobtail.’ And when one of them asked for a glass of water, ale was brought to him. Foolish Sir Everard!

Hugh, moreover, rubbed up a reputation which he had previously gained in the district as a pulpit orator, and officiated several times in the church of Sharsted, to the great delight of the parishioners, and certain of the quality, who came from afar to hear him. In all that pertained to his profession, Hugh was an earnest, unaffected fellow. Manly by nature, he strongly impressed his hearers by his sincere manliness. He was not one of those remarkably clever fellows who can believe nothing except what is contrary to common sense. Simply and courageously he spoke, and he was listened to with attention. Pious folk like to be preached to by a lord or a cobbler—to be taken honestly to task by one of themselves, or by one who,

socially, is decidedly above or beneath them. The village people liked Hugh in his gown all the better, because he was ‘a real gentleman’ out of it. And the gentry had a high relish for ‘such remarkable eloquence’ from a young man of ‘their own set.’

The reader may be sure that Lucy was a very happy girl,—sitting in a corner of the High House pew, with her eyes turned up to the pulpit where stood ‘the captain of her dreams,’ while her young heart beat with triumphant throbs, which a deep sense of religious awe did not make less frequent.

Hugh’s leave of absence was extended from a fortnight to a month, but even a month—although it is a long time for holiday-making—comes to an end. The visit did him much good,—and the memory of it yet more. It made his mean lodging in the East of London seem a brighter habitation, the sordid people about him less offensive, and his humble duties less irksome.

“ You may not be despondent,” said Hugh, the day before his return to London, as he and

Lucy sauntered up and down their favourite path in the garden. "We must be patient—and hopeful."

"Do I ever wear a sad face when you are with me?"

"No,—not when I am with you. But I am afraid you do—when I am away."

"Don't vex yourself with that fancy."

"Nay—it can be no mere fancy. This tedious waiting necessarily is more cruel to you than to me. I have work—stupid enough, Heaven knows!—that must be done; every day there is some drudgery or other for me to do—a sermon to scratch together, my schools to work in, some sick wretches to visit and talk to. Thus I have something to distract my thoughts and save me from discontent. But you, Lucy, you——"

"—like all other silly women, have only one pursuit," put in Lucy, with a smile.

Hugh nodded assent.

"Well," rejoined Lucy, again with a smile, "don't be proud of yourself and laugh at my poor sex. They are not the best workers who have a hundred irons in the fire at the same

time. I have often heard you say—‘there’s nothing like doing *one* thing well.’ ”

“ That’s right, beauty. Keep a good heart. It will be all as we wish, ere long.—Lucy, sometimes, as I sit at home in my little room through the long evenings, and think of you, strange and pleasant pictures rise before my eyes. Once I thought I was with you—as we are now, only that years had passed over our heads, leaving a hoary rime upon them, and gradually teaching us to move less proudly than the young are accustomed to do. And I saw ourselves standing together—arm locked in arm, not looking at each other—but at a scene, far extending and unspeakably lovely. It was our past lives that we two old people were looking at. And as we thought of all the happiness we had had together, how we had never thought for ourselves, but each for the other—how the wholesome instructions of our early experience had taught us to be cheerful under difficulties, and endowed us with a power of self-control, and a faculty of extracting happiness even from the most untoward circumstances;—as we thought of all this you came

closer to me, and whispered, ‘Hugh, I am thankful now that, when we were young,—*we had to wait.*’

This was a very grave speech for a lover. But Lucy was very happy, as she listened to it;—though she smiled no longer, and her eyes were bright with tears!

CHAPTER VI.

MARK CUDWORTH.

IT was easy for Hugh to preach, but he found it difficult to carry out in daily life his good precepts. Did he try to persuade himself that he was contented with his lot, and cared not to change it until Providence manifestly invited him to do so? Of course he did. But if the question is put, whether he succeeded in this praiseworthy attempt at self-delusion, the answer is—he didn't.

No one ever suspected how dissatisfied he was with his lot; for he had a high sense of what became the dignity of a poor gentleman, and scorned to moan about the troubles which

he was compelled to endure. He talked, and laughed, and acted as cheerily as ever. He wasn't a fool to worry himself unnecessarily about what he couldn't help. But I dare say that if he had known where a brighter fortune was to be won, he would have snatched at it as eagerly as a starving sempstress, when she thinks no eye is upon her, grabs at the loaf in the baker's basket. Not that he would have sacrificed a grain of honour for an unmeasured heap of gold. No base purpose could have lurked for a minute in his breast.

Possibly he thirsted for some potentate's empty crown, but he would never, even in a wish of the heart, have gained the circlet of gold to the detriment of its wearer. He had heard of Mr. Roper's illness, and even looked out the value of that aged rector's living in the *County Guide*. If he erred in doing so, he was punished for the error,—for the veteran rallied and lived for three or four years more.

Nothing turned up.

A year wore on, in which the only occurrence of importance to the Sharsted household was the order sent to Reginald's regiment to

move straight off from the West to the East Indies. There was some perilous commotion going on in our Oriental possessions.

Lucy was roused from a moody fit by the announcement that her dear brother was bound for the land of peril. She was startled by the intelligence; and a small monitor within her breast reproached her for having thought too much of her own causes for uneasiness. So she threw off the cloud from her brows, and old Sir Everard congratulated himself on being mistaken in his fancy that his darling was beginning to pine—at *having to wait*.

The shooting season came round again; and Hugh, something graver and harder in manner—as all his country friends thought—made another visit to the High House, shot partridges, sang songs, preached sermons, and made love. Once more, too, he left Sharsted, to work and to hope—with the sort of hope that is the shadow of despair.

The young man went very little into society; for he had neither time, nor money, nor inclination, to cultivate those means which every gentlemanly fellow, with decent introductions,

has of ‘making friends.’ Sometimes, when despondency had for days been growing on him, he would doff his white cravat, and walk up from the far East to the Inns of Law, and in some of the modest hotels near Fleet Street would spend a few hours, both before and after midnight, with a fraternity of young barristers, artists, and writers. This was the only change he had for weeks together, and there were those who grudged even that little enjoyment. Old Manthorpe, Mark Cudworth’s solicitor, saw the young man sitting, amongst his companions, in the coffee-room of the Pelican, with the godless decoration of a black silk necktie round his throat, and not only consuming profane mutton chops and whisky-toddy—but positively seeming to relish them. A clergyman—and to do such things! And in such company! Why he had a radical editor on his right; and on his left sat a gentleman who was notoriously unable to satisfy the just demands of his creditors! “And that was piety!” said good Mr. Manthorpe—“that was what clergymen of the Established Church could do without blushing!” A fine story

Uncle Mark had the next morning about the reckless extravagance and profligate living of his nephew!

But Uncle Mark did not appear to be much incensed at the intelligence, for the old man roused himself and wrote a letter to his nephew, inviting him to visit him at his earliest convenience. We may be sure that the summons was promptly obeyed. Hugh went to Mincing Lane immediately he received the note, and spent some hours with the wealthy merchant. Mark Cudworth thought business men ought not to live from their places of business. He occupied the self-same rooms in which he had established himself half a century before, when he first resolutely determined to do that which, in spite of great and innumerable obstacles, he had achieved—namely, ‘to make a fortune.’ Not a stick of new furniture had come into the comfortless rooms since that date ; the same high-backed cushionless chairs, lumbering tables and shelves, and enormous bureau, serving the purposes of the capitalist, that had done duty to the needy, striving, ambitious adventurer.

Thin, gaunt, pale—the old man would have made a first-rate miser in a melo-drama. Beyond the routine of business he did not seem to have a pleasure. He had no friends,—only parties with whom he had transactions. His festivities were confined to the monthly dinners of his ‘Company;’ and those banquets he attended—not for the good fare and costly wine, nor for intercourse with men of kindred pursuits, but for the three guineas which each liveryman of a certain standing was entitled to take out of the Corporation chest on leaving the dining-hall. Some of the wealthy merchants declined to pocket this perquisite; some of them ostentatiously handed the money over to the clerk, with directions that it should be transferred to a public charity. But Mark Cudworth always slipped the coins into his old-fashioned leather purse, saying, with a chuckle (it was the one pleasantry of his later years), “charity begins at home, gentlemen—charity begins at home.” At one of these monthly feasts, the prosperous citizens started a subscription for a poor lady, who had recently been brought from affluence to

a deplorable condition of poverty by the death of her husband in a state of insolvency. Mark's nearest neighbour put down his name for ten pounds. "Gentlemen—gentlemen"—exclaimed Mark, aghast at such an act of imprudence, and alarmed at finding himself next to a man incapable of managing his own affairs, "he—he has given away ten shillings a year from himself and his heirs for ever."

Mark had seen nothing of his nephew since the young man had entered the priesthood. He professed to be very angry with him for his choice of a vocation; but in reality his displeasure was caused by the recollection that Hugh had consumed his little patrimony. Magnanimity, however, was Mark Cudworth's line of conduct when Hugh made his appearance in Mincing Lane. The uncle was glad to see his sister's boy. He freely forgave him for being poor, for being a clergyman, for being the son of a gentleman of good family (Mark hated all gentlemen, and termed them 'aristocrats') for being engaged to a girl who hadn't a penny. He entered freely into conversation

with the young man, and asked him to respond to all his questions with candour. And Hugh, complying with such a very natural, but unexpected request, told the grey-headed old man the whole story of his hopes and trials and disappointments. He gave a description of his daily work, and with some rough, hot words, which gave his listener quite a new sensation, declared if he were ever to become a wealthy and powerful man, he would still be a zealous parish priest, and do his very utmost to help the wretched and distressed. There was something in this outpouring of a young manly nature that greatly affected the old merchant. Possibly his life-labours had, after all, been ill-directed and vain. Possibly the merchant recollect ed a text of scripture which he had often repeated when a little boy,—a text that spoke in very plain terms of the man's folly who should buy the whole world at the price of his own soul.

Mark professed to be much delighted with his nephew, and begged him to repeat his visits often.

Spring came; and its cold winds sadly shook

the old man. He could no longer shut his eyes to the disagreeable fact that he was breaking up. It was wonderful to Hugh how Death, as he drew nigh, seemed to soften and enrich the moral nature of his victim. Thick bands of iron, in which the mean passions of a sordid life had bound a naturally good heart, seemed to have snapped asunder. At least, so Hugh thought.

"Boy," said the old man to his visitor, one cold March morning; "I made my will yesterday—providing for a few old servants, and leaving the bulk of my money—indeed, almost all of it—where it'll do most good. I am a rich man. I have nigh £400,000,—a large property, Hugh! Ay, it is a very large property! When your poor old uncle is dead, Hugh, think kindly of him. Don't enjoy his wealth, and at the same time condemn too severely the avarice that raked it together."

If Hugh's heart beat high at these words, Sir Everard and Aunt Mabel and Lucy were even more delighted when they heard of Mark Cudworth's intentions towards his nephew. The elation of the baronet was immoderate. He

vowed that he had always held Mark Cudworth to be a queer customer, but at heart a really good fellow. What a man Hugh would be! He'd be able to buy back the Argentine estate, to build a new hall, to get into Parliament (No hang it! a parson mightn't sit in Parliament!) Well!—well!—everything good had its drawbacks.

And as for Lucy and Aunt Mabel,—they, too, were very happy! It no longer seemed wicked to Lucy to contemplate the consequences of Mark Cudworth's death, now that he had himself drawn attention to them, and stated who was to be his heir. Her spirits rose, and her beauty followed their example. She was no longer weary of waiting. She could remain a single maiden years longer without repining;—ay, she would gladly do so, if her being unwed could give enjoyment to the closing days, or prolong the existence—of good, kind, dear, old Mr. Cudworth. She would have done any act of extravagance to show the merchant how fond she was of him. He might detain Hugh by his bedside for a twelvemonth. Indeed, she had more than half a notion of volunteering to be the sick man's nurse. And in the changed

aspect of affairs how sweet a triumph was there to her love of Hugh! She had loved him when his fortunes were lowly, and the prospect before him was dark,—when prudent friends had hinted to her that he was ‘a poor match,’ and that in promising him her hand she was ‘literally throwing herself away.’

The villagers did not know the cause of the improvement in their young lady’s appearance, but they remarked how much brighter, and happier, and more beautiful Miss Lucy looked. Kind and considerate to them at all times, she became yet more affable and gracious. And if her outer life was fairer, so was her inner life more lovely. Prosperity is the best purifier of the heart. No longer did there lurk in her breast mean calculation or selfish anxiety. The serpent, which had lately caused so much trouble in that garden which a few pages since we took the liberty of entering, was charmed and benumbed—even (as it seemed) to death.

The bright turn which affairs had taken was felt rather than discussed. When it was alluded to in the family party of the High House, it was mentioned as the happy reconciliation between Hugh and his uncle,—not as a reversionary

interest in great wealth recently acquired by the former. That also was the tone of the communication in which Lucy imparted the glad tidings to her brother. Perhaps, in the letter which went by the same mail to India from Sir Everard's pen, the announcement was made in more outspoken terms. But men have harder ways of treating delicate subjects. There are some sensitive wounds to which a light touch, and a very firm one, cause comparatively little pain,—while a manipulation that holds a middle course between the two produces extreme torture. In such cases men are wont to use the firm, and women the light touch. But to Reginald it cannot be doubted that both epistles were alike pleasant.

Mark Cudworth rallied for a time, and moved to Harrowgate for change of air. He would not allow his nephew to be away from him, so Hugh obtained leave of absence from his cure, and attended on the invalid.

September came, and wore slowly away; so did October; but Hugh's gun was not heard amongst the Sharsted Hills, and Lucy had to forego her regular annual treat. Never did

young lady more amiably put up with such a disappointment. Christmas covered the roof of the High House with snow, and through the leafless trees of the avenues a wanderer might hear in the distance the ring of skates on the ice-bound water. But Hugh still remained on duty with his uncle. The old man was once more in his dusty, comfortless, repulsive rooms in Mincing Lane. He was worse again. In the early part of February the doctors said he could not live out the month. But they were deceived—(doctors are deceived sometimes); and in March the veteran still battled on against decay. The cold winds of that month however completed his destruction; and Mark Cudworth left behind him—the world, and all the wealth which he had stamped with his paltry name.

Perhaps there was a vague sense of relief in Hugh's mind at this conclusion to his services. He could not, of course, experience much sorrow at the blow which removed so very old a man from the world, and left him lord of a noble fortune.

He wrote down to Sharsted, briefly announcing the event. Sir Everard put his house-

hold in mourning. There was a painful excitement of expectation—leavened in some slight measure, let it be owned, by triumph—in the breasts of the principal inmates of the High House during the days that intervened between the merchant's death and his funeral.

By the next post that left London for the country, after the latter event, Hugh sent a brief letter to his guardian. When Lucy saw the direction on it, she presumed it was merely to state that its writer would follow it in the course of a few hours.

But she was mistaken.

Sir Everard hastily broke the seal, and read the following words:—

“ Dear Sir Everard,

“ My mother's brother, Mark Cudworth, has left a will, which I saw for the first time yesterday, leaving his entire property to found an hospital. Not one penny of his riches comes to me.

“ Your very affectionate Friend,

“ HUGH ARGENTINE.”

CHAPTER VII.

SAD WITHIN—SADDER WITHOUT.

WHEN the writer of this story was quite a boy, he witnessed a death-bed scene, the humour of which struck him not less forcibly than did the solemnity which must ever exist where a human life is being brought to a close.

In an out-of-the-way parish of east Suffolk, an old man named Anthony Warriner had lived for many years on a small farm of not very productive land. He had commenced life as a footman to one of the county squires, and, after a domestic servitude of twenty-five years, had contrived to save enough money to take on easy terms, from his master, the

holding on which he remained till the end of his days. The thriftiness and habitual self-denial which had made the squire and his lady praise Anthony as ‘a most sensible young man,’ and which had raised him from the condition of a menial servant to that of ‘a respectable rate-paying, rent-paying tenant-farmer,’ increased rapidly as he grew older. The size of his ‘occupation,’ and the amount of capital at his command, did not admit of his making money fast; but fast was he resolved to hold the modest winnings which rewarded his toil. The opposition, both intellectual and moral, the ridicule, the gibes, the censure which Anthony endured from rural wit, and malice and morality may be imagined by those who have studied human nature, and found it the same amongst country boors and representatives of urbane culture. In the market-room which Anthony frequented for commercial purposes, there were many good stories afloat about his stinginess; how he well-nigh quarrelled with his two men, and was within an ace of losing their services in the middle of harvest, because he grudged the mild beer

with which he was bound to supply them; how he never ate wheaten bread, or bacon oftener than once a week; how he always walked the whole six miles to market, in order to save the three-pence he would otherwise have to pay the Red Lion 'ostler for looking to his steed. Nor did this sort of scandal prevail only in the market-room. In the homesteads, the whole district through, farmers' dames had *their say* about that Anthony Warriner. Their great charge against him was, that he wouldn't marry—because of the expense; “though, of course, the man being what the man was, he'd have to look a long time before he'd find a woman worth having, and able to make the most of a farm-yard, willing to trust her happiness with him.”

These sarcasms reached Anthony's ears from all directions. *Tenax propositi*, he held a calm unruffled temper, and allowed his neighbours to clack (it's a way that neighbours have !) As years and tens of years went on, Anthony still persevered in the course he had selected for his steps. His hair grew white and very

thin; his cunning gray eyes lost all the little brightness with which they were endowed in youth; his meagre face was shrivelled by age and the misery of his wretched existence. But still he lived on at eighty years of age, thin, wasted, clad like a beggar; sordid, avaricious, and querulous.

The only inmate of his house, besides himself, was an aged, decrepid woman, made exactly after his model. Martha Scranchit (for that was her name) had been turned out from family after family for dishonesty. She was such a notorious thief that no person of respectability would give her employment, and she was on the point of being removed to the workhouse, when Anthony chanced to be introduced to her, and engaged her to preside over his hearth; to get the fowls ready for market, cook the luxurious food on which he (Anthony) sustained himself, and make herself generally useful. The master and servant suited each other admirably. He paid her no wages, only giving her in return for her services lodging and pauper fare. Every penny the poor crone got into her hands was

stolen ; and yet such was her marvellous faculty of acquisition, she had many silver pieces hoarded in the dark corners of her master's out-buildings. To detect her thefts and make her disgorge her prey, were the amusements of Anthony's closing years. He was not disturbed by her nefarious practices, for he knew that, let them be ever so successful, they would fail to supply her with a tenth of the wages he would have to pay any other servant. At the same time, it was a constant source of pleasure to be watching and outwitting one who was continually bent on getting the better of him. It was nothing less than the introduction of all the pleasant excitement of the market-room into his home life. He grew genuinely fond of the crone, who was ready at every hour of the day to play at a game so suited to his tastes.

At last, however, Anthony's pulses began to run slow. Asthma struck its ragged talons into his breast ; and he suffered so much and so acutely, that he scarce could enjoy himself —when sitting in his arm-chair, and, keenly watching the movements of his companion, he

would mutter, "Ah, ah! money—money—it's what we all want, and what so few have. It's no use, Martha, my eye's on you, you crafty old jade! You can't rob me: I am too many for you—a great deal too many for you! You're a clever one—but you're no match for me." Soon the old man was so nigh death, and his danger was so apparent to himself, that he threw aside all considerations of economy, and feeling that a medical practitioner might as well have a few pounds of his savings, when Death was about to take the whole, he sent for the nearest doctor. The doctor to whom this summons was despatched, was away from home; but the doctor's pupil was soon at the miser's bed-side.

The old man was dying of the exhaustion of eighty-six years, as much as anything else. He was sitting up in his bed, in a comfortless cold room, with his eyes strained towards an antique walnut-wood bureau—the only respectable piece of furniture in the house. It was quaintly covered, and strongly clamped with steel and brass; in fact, a chattel for which a fancy-upholsterer in London would ask a

strangely large number of pounds from connoisseurs of old furniture. Anthony kept his cash and papers and other valuables in it.

" You're too late, you're too late," gasped Anthony, as the young medical student entered the room; " and 'tisn't the real doctor, but only the young'un. Now, mind—(gasp) mind, I haven't taken any of your physic—(more gasping)—no, not a drop; and you can't charge for anything."

Anthony was assured that neither he nor his executors should be called upon to disburse a farthing for the visit, and on this declaration being reiterated, he became calmer. He knew that he was dying: stating so with the quiet decision of a man not under the influence of fear. The young student by his side had had very little experience in his profession, but he knew enough of the symptoms under his observation, to see that Anthony was a good judge of his own case. The boy told the veteran that he could not live at the most for more than a few hours, and with a strong desire, natural to youth and inexperience, to be strictly business-like on so momentous an

occasion, suggested, with great gravity, that it would be well for the expiring man to send for a lawyer and settle his affairs, if he had not already done so. Anthony replied that his will had been made several years, and he was thankful to say no lawyer would get anything more out of him for a last testament.

Martha Scranchit, whose eyes had manifested how keenly alive she was to the importance of the 'young doctor's' suggestion, gave with her countenance an involuntary expression of chagrin at her master's answer. Umph! the will had been made *many* years! She hadn't lived *many* years in Anthony Warriner's service. Possibly, after all her hopes, her name was not in the old man's will. These thoughts were clearly legible in the look of fright and disappointment which for an instant, and no longer, took possession of her face. It lasted for only a moment, but in that minute speck of time old Anthony saw it, and construed it correctly. The discovery acted like a cordial on his heart-strings, quick-

ening his circulation, and nerving him for one last contest with his domestic.

"Martha Scranchit," he gasped, "your poor old master is going from you, and you'll be left alone."

Martha wiped her eyes with the corner of her dirty apron, and whined out a prayer that her dear, dear master mightn't be taken from her. "Oh! what should she do? Oh! oh!"

"Yes, Martha Scranchit, you'll miss me very much." (A long fit of gasping.) "But you'll find friends, I trust, to keep you from the house. A workhouse is a cruel place for an old woman of your years—a cruel place. But friends'll turn up to help you. Poor old women, that have no childer and bid fair soon to be bed-ridden, allus have friends. Whoever heard of them being without friends?"—(A terrific attack of gasping—but Anthony had a great point to gain by living through it, and so he survived the paroxysm.)—"My will, Martha, was made afore you served me, and so your name isn't in it. I am sorry for it, Martha; but there's no helping it, for there

isn't time to make another. Still, you've been a good and faithful servant ; you've never wronged me, for you've never stole a quarter of the wage of an ordinary servant, and you've been a gentle, tender, watchful nurse to me during my failing sickness."

At this pathetic statement Martha snivelled freely, and polished her eyes with her rough apron till they looked tipsy.

"And I should like," continued Anthony, "that you should have something to remember your poor old master by—something valuable and useful—something that'd be a comfort to you if you prospered, and a—a—that'd turn into money if you were unfortunate. Now, Martha, is there anything in the house you'd like to have to remember your master by ; just as a token that he vallied your kindness?"

At this question Martha's eyes flashed triumphantly through the tears that dimmed them. There was hope for her even yet. She acted her part, however, to perfection. Instead of jumping at the proffered gift, she treated it coyly, almost with an affectation of

terror, as though at the best it was a painful alternative, a possession depending on a contingency on which she was unable calmly to reflect. ‘She was sure her dear master was frightening hisself without a cause—leastwise frightening others—for he had no cause to be afeared, for he was as good a Christian as ever ockypied land. She knew he’d come round, and be right hearty again. But still, if it should please God to lay him by the wall, she should so like to have—just to comfort her poor old eyes by looking at it in the lonesome hours—the wa’nut-tree chist. She had allus fancied it, and now that her poor dear master had said what he had said, that wa’nut-tree chist did seem like to be a part of her hear-rt.’

The wa’nut-tree chist, it is needless to say, was the walnut-bureau already mentioned.

“Well, Martha, I like your choice;” gasped Anthony, gradually becoming weaker in his voice and enunciations, “it’s a prudent choice, and just what I thought you would have made. It’s a vallable bit o’ furnitur. I once spoke to Mr. Dilston, a very clever man in such matters, and who knows furnitur well, and he tould

me—that—that—(more asthma)—it was worth a matter o'tharty pound, if not more. And you'd like to have it, Martha? You'd like to have it."

For three hours the old man lay, propped up by pillows, muttering to himself, "Wa'nut-tree chist—a vallable bit of furnitur. Worth tharty pounds. A great deal—a great deal. And I can't keep it any longer. Martha, too, does deserve it. She has done well by me."

As the ominous rattle rose higher and higher in Anthony's throat, Martha became nervous. She begged the young doctor not to leave till 'it was all over.' That youngster saw that Martha wished him to stay, because, -in case the dying man made her a formal presentation of the coveted 'chist,' it would be just as well to have a witness to corroborate her account of the transaction to the executors. Partly out of good-humour, but much more out of a desire to see the end of a strange scene, the youth complied, and sitting down on a comfortless old-fashioned high-backed chair, counted the moments as they were ticked out by a Dutch clock on the staircase.

After a long and dreary waiting, the close came.

A cry of something like alarm from the sufferer, brought the two watchers to his side, when at least one of the two was surprised to see a smile of triumphant humour and self-gratulation on the face from which, in another minute, Death was about to take the warmth of life. “Martha—Martha—I am going,” old Anthony faintly gasped out his last words, “good-bye, good-bye. As you’d like to have the wa’nut-tree chist—you may—you may—if you like, *buy it at the auction. It'll be sold at the auction.*”

A ghastly chuckle followed this speech, and a flash of exultant malice from the speaker’s eyes gave emphasis to the conclusion, when even the memory of that last sweet triumph was erased from the miser’s mind—the human spirit within him was dissipated—and there was nothing for Martha Scranchit to avenge her insulted feelings upon, save an emaciated and lifeless body.

It may interest the reader to know that this strange character left the accumulations

of his industry and parsimony—amounting to some few thousands of pounds—to the son of his old master, the heir of that gentleman in whose service, or upon whose land, he had passed all his days.

Upon his nephew, Mark Cudworth had, on a large scale, played just such a joke as that which Anthony Warriner perpetrated with his last breath. Had Hugh Argentine borne himself to his uncle like a sycophant, had he fawned and plotted, had he patiently endured insult from the cruel miser, had he smiled at the old man's vulgar gibes, his disappointment would have merited no sympathy. Had he even deigned to trim his sails to Mark Cudworth's fanciful caprices, or had exercised that small amount of prudence and calculation, which the rather mean and very much over-praised quality, called common-sense, would have dictated, no man of the world would have aught to cause him an unpleasant thought in the affair. The nephew would then have been merely in the position of a speculator who has missed his aim,—a player at *rouge-et-noir* who has staked on the losing colour.

But throughout their intercourse, from first to last, Hugh had maintained a manly bearing to his wealthy relation. Instead of looking to him for assistance, he had relied on himself. Where conscience or honour had commanded him to run counter to the whims of Dives, he had not hesitated to do so. Instead of seeking him out and paying him court, he had resolutely persevered in his course of irksome duty, never even in moments of despondency allowing any glittering hopes to beguile him into neglect of his stern taskwork. It was the old man who had sent for him; it was the false, selfish, cruel old man who had induced him to cherish expectations—for one sole end—that he might drink the very bitterest dregs of defeat.

If anything could be added to the brutal insult offered to the young man in the disposition of his uncle's property, that additional element of injury was found in the various provisions of the will, which excluded him from the remotest possibility of being directly or indirectly benefited by the bequeathed property. Four hundred thousand pounds were left to

found an hospital ; and there was a clause in the will prohibiting the trustees from conferring on Hugh, or any child that might be born to him, any office in the establishment to which a salary of any kind whatever was attached.

Well ! well !

A little earth over Mark Cudworth !—a little earth !

But those he left behind him are not so easily disposed of.

When Sir Everard first received the disastrous intelligence, it well nigh stunned him. He tried to keep Lucy for a time in ignorance of the whole truth, he stammered out something about Hugh being disappointed as to the amount of wealth his uncle had left behind him, and then he hurried from the room into his study—to seek consolation, and commune with himself in a wilderness of guns, boots, and hunting whips. But Lucy saw in the expression that seized his features, as he read Hugh's note, all the misfortune that had befallen her. When she encountered Sir Everard again, it was past mid-day ; and in the few brief hours during

which he had been away from her, sorrow had bitten deep lines into his face.

"Father," said Lucy, with a terrible effort to control herself, "you need not tell me the contents of Hugh's note. He is still as poor as he was when I first loved him. I am—I am—very sorry *for him*. It will be a bitter trial to him. But do not you be sad too—oh, do not look so wretched,—that will kill me."

The old baronet tried to smile a 'God cheer you' to his child. It was a sorry, ghastly attempt at a smile. He looked tenderly and with a kind of affright into his girl's pale, gentle, anguish-stricken face. The sight, with all the host of associations it called up, was more than his manhood could endure. For a few moments he held out his hands, and tried to utter some idle words of comfort; and then, sitting down on a sofa, he buried his grand old face in his hands, and gave way to grief—as men sometimes will—as *he* had not since a certain dismal winter afternoon, more than a score years back, when he sate at one of the upper windows of the High House, and, gazing at the quiet church, thought of her whom he had that day

laid there to rest till the day of judgment, and dared not think how his after-life would flow on without her.

Lucy sat down by her father's side, and caressingly stroked the white hair of his head, till he roused himself to say—"Run away, child. We must keep apart till we are strong enough to comfort each other. At least 'tisn't for me to add to your trouble. I thought I could behave better. I shall be more a man by-and-by."

But as Lucy did not seem inclined to obey his request, Sir Everard kissed her gently, and went away—to be once more by himself.

Then Lucy Adenbrooke, being alone, went to her room, into which we have already intruded once, and, throwing herself down on her little white couch, tried in vain to think. The cold spring wind was sighing and moaning amongst the branches of the park-avenues, buffeting the gray steeple and spire of the church, howling round the Traverse and Nurse Vincent's cottage, sweeping along the terrace, making the black boughs of the cedars creak as they swayed up and down, and wailing round the pinnacles of the High House like 'infant misery.'

It was a dry, cold wind—cold as the weight that lay on poor Lucy's heart, and dry as her staring, tearless eyes. She caught herself listening to it, and was grateful to it for being so in accordance with her feelings. The dark, cheerless day became darker and more gloomy. Twilight crept up, and deepened into night. Then the wind lulled ; and Lucy lay in a dreamy state of semi-consciousness, and wondered where the boisterous element had gone, and why such a calmness had taken its place.

She heard voices in her room. She heard a noise at the fire-place, as of some one kindling a fire. It was her servant's step. There was a crackling of flames, followed by a grateful warmth spreading through the room, and giving a sense of comfort to her chilled limbs. Then followed another period of silence, scarce lasting a minute, but seeming to be an hour, broken at last by a well-known voice—which said,—

“ Why, Lucy love, you had let your fire out. You must be very cold. Here, darling, take some of this hot tea, and let me sit with you.”

“ Put it down, aunt,” Lucy answered

startled at her own voice. "Put it down; and oh, dear Aunt Mabel, come near to me, and kiss me. It will do me so much more good."

Then came the tears that had not been able to flow—all that long day of tribulation.

She shivered at first, as if the chill that had for hours been embracing her heart, on being driven from its resting-place, struck fresh terror and disquiet into her nerves. Then, like a little baby nestling into its mother's breast, she twined closer and closer to Aunt Mabel, and, putting an arm round her neck, clung to her for help. And Aunt Mabel was such a little fragile thing—so minute, and delicate, and feeble; and Lucy was such a fine-formed noble girl; that the contrast between the comforter and the comforted would have suggested to the beholder a vision of a poor drowning man clutching at a weed to save himself from destruction. But Aunt Mabel was no mere dry reed—unable to give support, and not worthy to be trusted. A mere tendril she was—but there was strength in her. Our American cousins would use one of their pet similes, and liken her to hickory. But a

better object, in which to seek a resemblance, is one of those pure, modest flowers which exhibit their beauty only when the wind is keen, and snow lies upon the ground, and nature's face has little cheer in it.

"Dear aunt!" at last said Lucy, when she had sobbed herself into something like composure, "I cannot bear it; I shall not be able to endure my life. I almost wish I had never seen Hugh; I do wish I had never cared more for him;—and yet it is so sweet to love him. He ought not to go on wasting his life—gradually coming to taste the bitterness of disappointment which I feel, and have for so many days felt, although I have never allowed my heart to own it. I have been no better than a curse to him. He might have married a rich girl, with all the beauty and none of the evil I have. His uncle—his wicked cruel uncle—would not have treated him as he has done, if love for a penniless girl had not made him seem to the old miser so imprudent as to be beyond the power of wealth to do him good. I would gladly sacrifice myself, and take misery for my lot in this short life below, if I could set him

free—and see him really happy. But I can't. He is chained to me. It would kill him, if I told him to forget me; just as it would kill me if he deserted me. This is the worst of it.—Oh! I would not care what befell me, if I could but see him happy."

This was said in a very disjointed manner, and with many strange digressions and extravagances of feeling.

Doubtless, Aunt Mabel, in giving the account to the transcriber of these pages, omitted much from what actually occurred; partly because she had forgotten some things, and partly because many of her darling's confidences were too sacred for repetition, or meant only for woman's ears.

"Aunt Mabel!" cried Lucy, in conclusion, with something of the egotism of sorrow, "you have never suffered as I do—you cannot know what my grief is!"

"No, dear, thank God!" replied the old lady, simply, "I have had a happy life—and I am very grateful for it. I have had you to love and be loved by, and our Reginald and your Hugh, and my dear brother who has shown me

more tenderness and care than any husband could have done. Few women have had so much real happiness in life. Sometimes I am wicked enough to think it would have been better for me to have had more trouble. Last November, when I was ill, I thought, Lucy, that the time had come for me to leave the dear old High House, and Everard, and you. I had no terror at the thought of death; for I know that when I die, I shall partake of the blessing which was brought to the world more than eighteen hundred years ago. But still I could not bear the prospect of quitting all the resting-places of my affection here. I love you all so—the dear old home where I was brought up, as a little girl, and have lived for so many years—and—and all of you. Now, darling, the earth ought not to have a stronger hold on my heart than heaven—ought it?"

"Aunt," inquired Lucy, timidly, with a curiosity that she was somewhat ashamed of, and which half feared might be wrong, "did you ever love in another way? Were you ever engaged? Did you ever wish to be any one's? Did you ever love—so?"

Lucy roused herself as she put these questions. She coloured at her audacity; but the fire-light was not strong enough to display her blushes to Aunt Mabel.

"Lor, love!" answered Aunt Mabel, simply, "all girls do that! I was a saucy, merry child once. What girl of seventeen does not think herself in love? What has put the fancy into your head?"

"But were you ever engaged?"

"Yes—yes—Lucy. There—there—let it be."

"Dear aunt," whispered Lucy, earnestly, "do tell me. It will teach me what it is good for me to know."

There was a pause.

"How long, aunt, is it since you loved him?"

"I love him still."

"What! Is he alive?"

"In another world," responded Aunt Mabel, softly.

There was another pause.

But Lucy could not rest.

"Dear aunt—tell me—do tell me—did he

love you better than all other living things, even to the last?"

"Lucy," Aunt Mabel answered slowly, "he married another."

A cold shudder crossed Lucy's breast, as she said, "Then he was a bad man, and unworthy of you."

"Dear one, you wrong him. He was noblest amongst the noble. There was no selfishness in him. There is not such a man left on the earth."

There was a strange music in the speaker's voice; it was very low and soft, and it seemed to be speaking the words of a holy ritual.

"I will tell you all. I have never spoken of it before to any one. I preferred keeping the memory of it in my own heart, all to myself; it has been the quiet pleasure of my life to regard it; and my joy would have been lessened had I felt that others were aware of it.

"When I was a girl, Lucy, I passed two years in the family of my mother's brother, in the north of England. It was then and there it happened. He was a clergyman; I will not mention his name, but he was rarely

endowed—noble by nature as well as birth—learned, so that even the greatest scholars of the time consulted him about their works—full of all those accomplishments, too, which hold a young girl's heart more strongly than greater merits—and—and—dear, I could not tell you how handsome he was. He was wealthy. He was older some years than I; he was one-and-thirty, and I only a girl of seventeen or eighteen years. He loved me! My poor father and mother were dead, and my brother Everard was out of the country with the army. I did not write to him of my engagement, for letters were often mis-sent in the camp, and I could not bear the thought of such a letter, as that in which I might have informed him of my happiness, falling into wrong hands. I do not think he ever knew of my engagement. Long before he returned it was at an end."

"But, aunt, how did it end? It must have been very wrong."

"Child of mine, *he*, when he was younger (a mere stripling at college) loved another. She, perhaps, then never guessed how he

cared for her, or possibly she could not then have loved him as she did afterwards. She married another ; but he never forgot her, never ceased to worship her memory. Even when he begged me to be his wife, he would not stoop to deception, but told me of that passage in his life, and told it to me, Lucy, so that I gloried in him for it. I would rather have had such a second love of such a heart than all the first affection in the world ! Well, our engagement had not lasted two months when *her* husband died. Ere long I learnt that she had discovered how she was regarded by him, and I learnt, too, that she was a noble creature, worthy of him. If such a thing could be, he was gentler to me than before ; he always appeared happy when he knew my eyes were upon him ; but I saw him when he imagined himself alone—and then there was such a sadness on his face as my young life had never imagined. You know, beauty, how a woman, when she really loves, can read the heart of her lover ! *how she can act !* There was but one thing to do. I played with him—I made him believe me a heartless coquette. He expostulated with

me ; I answered with ridicule and flippancy. My uncle's family all cried shame upon me; I have never known them since. I—I—threw him from me. He never imagined *why*. He married his first love, and God blessed them with much joy and fine children; and the whole world has heard of his fame and goodness."

"Oh ! dear aunt, did he never discover what you had suffered for him : how nobly you had sacrificed yourself?"

"For years, Lucy," the old lady answered very slowly, with a pause between every few words, "that was my sorrow,—the ever-present knowledge of the opinion he had of me,—and the impossibility of undceiving him,—without troubling him. But that trial is at an end now: for he is in heaven.—He no longer sees through a glass darkly, but knows me."

The fire was burning low, and had ceased to give much light to the room.

Lucy Adenbroke put forth her hand to touch the quiet face of her aunt, and felt the silent tears upon it. Then Aunt Mabel hastily kissed her, and slipped out of the apartment

into which she had brought solace, and from which she took away somewhat of sorrow. And Lucy remained thinking how strange it was that she had never suspected Aunt Mabel's secret.

Has not each of us a secret? The heart knoweth its own bitterness. Would that none could meddle with its sorrows!

CHAPTER VIII.

INVALIDED.

THE agitation caused by the occurrences of that unlucky spring had a lasting and sad effect on Lucy Adenbroke. She tried bravely to fight against the weight of gloom ever bearing down upon her, but the weak flesh would not aid the willing spirit.

Hugh came down to see her, and she seemed to him to endure her disappointment with so equable a mind, that he went back to London, cheered into something resembling his former hopefulness. To Sir Everard Lucy always showed a serene face. The old baronet missed from it the light of its old mirth, and marked upon it a subdued gravity that re-

minded him of the expression of resignation which came over his wife's gentle countenance, when she was told that in a few hours she would be taken from husband and children, never to see them again till they had been glorified by the power that dwells behind the curtain of death.

Sir Everard observed and pondered over that change, but it did not at first depress him, for he saw her ever cheerful to others, attentive in discharging the little duties of her daily life, more considerate than ever to servants and dependents and poor friends in the village, and manifesting a healthy interest in all that surrounded her. He was deeply moved by discovering in her manner an increased anxiety to have the affection of every creature formed by its Maker to feel and bestow affection. She clung to every being that seemed to care for her. Even to the very dogs, as she patted and caressed them, looking beseechingly into their honest eyes, she seemed to say, "Think of me, be very fond of me, for I want you now more than ever; more than ever."

Sir Everard noticed she never laughed with her old, merry, rippling, ringing laughter. Lucky for him he never suspected how many hours, when he was riding Gossamer about his farms, she passed in silent bitter tears, in her solitary room, where none came,—not even a good spirit—to comfort her!

Week after week she grew paler and more thin. She lost strength, too, visibly; discontinuing her habit of early rising; flagging and retiring to rest long before the close of the evenings; and often disappearing in the mid-day to lie down from languor—seeking for the refreshment which she never found.

Then Sir Everard and Aunt Mabel became frightened, and the physician was summoned from Newton Coggs. When that learned and suave functionary made his appearance at the High House, he did not require a very long interview with his patient to discover what was the matter. The quick feeble pulse—running like a small thin thread of fire, the restless eyes, sunken cheeks, and parched skin, were a character that a mere novice in nosology could have construed. Lucy, too, left

the good man in no doubt as to her case. She liked the doctor as one of her very best friends. He had often before come to her bed-side, and by kind words had seemed to charm away sickness. He had, when she was a little unconscious babe, sate and watched her dying mother, who (Aunt Mabel had often told Lucy the story when she was a child), after speaking the words of her last sorrowful farewell to Sir Everard, and her boy, and sister-in-law, turned her grateful eyes to her medical attendant, and said, with her last breath, "And you, too, Dr. Anstey—I love you, too."

So Lucy had good reason to treat her physician with confidence. It was a relief to her, after so many terrible weeks of conscientious hypocrisy, to be able to tell the truth—the whole truth—to a friend with a heart made for generous sympathy,—and to lay aside the pious fraud in which she had so courageously persevered.

"Oh, dear Dr. Anstey," said Lucy quickly, (and with a pathos that almost startled the doctor out of the judicious line of address which at the first glance he saw he ought to

adopt) putting, as she spoke, both her small white hands over her heart; “you can’t do me any good this time—it’s all here, here—and you can’t cure that.”

And the doctor, who in a trice recovered his self-command, replied with a sort of cooing cossetting laugh, as he gently took hold of one of the small white hands ; “Oh—oh—you don’t know all that we doctors can do. Wait a week or so, my dear young lady, and then tell me if I *can’t cure that*.”

But when the doctor, having terminated his interview with his patient, came into the wainscotted parlour, where Sir Everard and Aunt Mabel were sitting, anxiously waiting for his report, he wore a grave and troubled face.

“Anstey, you have nothing good to say,” said Sir Everard.

“Well, well; not much, not much. Lucy is very nervous, and there’s a great deal of febrile action, as well as mental depression.”

“Call it by its right name, man,” growled Sir Everard.

Whereto Dr. Anstey, in an expostulatory manner replied; “No, no; no names just at

present. We'll wait, Sir Everard, and see what a few hours will bring about. Names are such extreme and terrifying things. I have given ample directions to Nurse Vincent (I am glad she is here), and there, you see John is off (pointing to a servant cantering over the park on the back of Gossamer) to Newton Coggs to get my prescription dispensed. I must go now, for I have to drive twelve miles out beyond you. But I'll be back at ten o'clock to night, and as my horses will be knocked up, I'll stop and bait, and remain with you for a couple of hours. Now, mind, Sir Everard, don't frighten yourself till you see me again,—there's a good man;—good-bye."

Aunt Mabel followed the doctor into the hall. The doctor heard her light step behind him,—indeed he had expected it.

"Miss Mabel," he said, in a mysterious whisper, turning round and beckoning her to follow him to a distant corner of the hall.

He took up a position behind a suit of steel-armour, that cut rather an absurd figure on a sort of tailor's block, and then lowering his

head till his lips were in a line with the ear of the pale, trembling, little lady by his side, he said, "Miss Mabel, you're a woman, and won't be scared out of your wits like your brother. I shall be here again at ten o'clock, but by that time Lucy will be delirious. She is going to have an attack of brain fever. You must do what you think best with Sir Everard. Now, go straight up stairs to Nurse Vincent. She has some messages from me. We'll have a long talk to-night."

Aunt Mabel made no word of answer. She only took the physician's right hand in hers, and kissed it with womanly tenderness, and then turned away to do as she was bid.

Women are at all times very fond of their doctors, retaining in health a pure and lively gratitude for the services rendered to them in sickness; whereas men only cordially love the members of the faculty when they are at death's door.

"Three faces wears the doctor; when first sought,
An angel's;—and a god's, the cure half wrought;
But when that cure complete, he seeks his fee,
The devil looks less terrible than he."

The first of these three faces Dr. Anstey always wore in the eyes of Aunt Mabel. Certainly, she was such a constant invalid, that she had every month of her life fresh reason for feeling obliged and grateful to him. And never did she fly more gladly to him than on that terrible night, when, half-an-hour after his time (the roads were very bad) the doctor stepped out of his carriage, and entered the High House.

"It's just as you said it would be, dear Dr. Anstey," the lady informed him. "I have spoken to Everard. He knows all about it; and he bears it very quietly."

The girl was confined to her bed for many weeks.

It was found necessary to cut off close to her head the rich lustrous hair which we admired on first making her acquaintance. Fortunately she was gentle and manageable, with childlike docility doing exactly what Nurse Vincent bade her, and testifying to Aunt Mabel gratitude for her tender watching. But distressing delirium took possession of her mind, in which the memories of the past were

perverted so as to make the present stern and gloomy. At first Sir Everard was a frequent visitor by his sick child's bedside. For a week or more, he was the only person who approached her that she did not recognise; and the old man would sit at the foot of her couch,—his head drooping despondently, no word coming from his lips, no movement in any part of his huge frame,—gazing hopelessly and helplessly on the wreck which mental agony had made of his beautiful daughter. At last she knew him, and addressed him in such wise that he would fain have not had her greeting.

It happened in this way.

Her dark eyes—so staring and round, so disproportionately large, now that illness had reduced the rest of her face to little more than the palm of a lady's hand—opened and fixed their gaze on the subdued old man.

“ Ah, sir,” she said slowly, after a moment's pause, “ was I not right? Do you remember that morning, papa, when I told you that God would punish us for our wicked thought? We wished him dead—we did not really care what

became of him, so long as we had his wealth. It came on us by little and little. The one lean creature devoured all our noble ones; it was such a fearful creature, nothing could stand against it. I knew how it would be. I saw our overthrow and destruction coming. We are justly punished. But—but—*we can never be forgiven.*”

“Merciful heaven!” murmured Sir Everard, hoarsely.

He knelt down by his child, took her wan wasted hand in his, and, with an unspoken prayer that he might be inspired to impart solace and relief to her troubled conscience, he said, in an under tone, but slowly and impressively, “Lucy, my darling, don’t harp on an idle speech of mine. It was very wrong of me to have made it, and long ago I repented of it. It is pleasant to me to know that you reproved me for it. But do not say my sin cannot be forgiven; it is wrong to say so—for, Lucy, all our sins will be forgiven.”

Lucy answered in a languid monotone, as if the inclination had seized her to carry on an argument which she had not strength enough

to sustain,—“Oh, no, papa—you are quite mistaken. It wasn’t your evil thought—it was mine. You spoke it idly—I thought it earnestly. I cried out against you, because I could not endure the wickedness within me.”—(Then she shuddered, and after a few seconds’ silence, became excited.)—“It is *in* me—I can’t conquer it, I can’t crush it, or kill it, or put it asleep. Oh, papa,—take it out of my heart—pray God to take it out of my heart.”

With these words the lucid interval ceased.

Half-an-hour afterwards, when Nurse Vincent returned to her post of duty, she found her charge in a paroxysm of fever, muttering and singing with delirium, and much the worse for having been left alone for a short time with Sir Everard.

Dr. Anstey, at his next visit, prohibited the baronet from having further interviews with his daughter, until she was in a state of convalescence. Poor Sir Everard complied without a grumble. He saw the wisdom of the interdiction. But he led a dreary life for the next few weeks—waiting, in a sort of despair, the

event of a contest in which he could take no part.

When Lucy was brought down stairs for the first time in the month of May to sit for half an hour by the drawing-room fire, and once more to see her dear old father, from whose society she had for so many days been debarred, it was impossible to say whether she or Sir Everard was the more altered. Deep lines had been bitten into the baronet's face, his figure was bowed, and his whole aspect was changed. The villagers and the humble people on the estate remarked the alteration that had been so rapidly wrought in him; and sinister rumours went about to the effect that Sir Everard was 'wonderfully broken'—in short, that he was 'breaking up.'

As soon as Lucy was strong enough to make the requisite exertion, she left the High House, and under the protection of her father and Aunt Mabel moved about from place to place in search of the vigour which had deserted her. She tarried for a time in Bath; she went to that elegant drawing-room for invalids—Leamington; when the fierce hot weather set in,

she was carried north to the fresh bracing air of Scarborough; and when the leaves began to fall from the Sharsted avenues, the loungers on the Brighton cliff often observed a fragile, lovely girl—whose delicate features made every chivalric man wish to uncover his head or do something to show her homage or shield her from harm—taking her drive on the parade in an open carriage. “Oh—yes,” it would be said in different ways amongst the gossippers, “they are the Adenbrokes—that lovely woman is poor Miss Adenbroke; and that fine old fellow, sitting with his back to the horses, is Sir Everard. No one here knows anything about them,—but everybody likes them.”

Dr. Anstey had advised continual change for Lucy. The current of her thoughts, the physician said, must be, by every available means, made pleasant. She was of a highly nervous temperament, and if she were allowed to worry herself about any one distressing subject, why, to one of her peculiar organization, the result would be most distressing; her mind was so delicately strung, it was impossible to say how far it, as well as her bodily health, might be

affected. Dr. Anstey, it may be remembered, had an objection to using strong terms; but he contrived in his cautious, roundabout way, to make his meaning tolerably clear.

So much was Lucy benefited by the doctor's plan, that when she arrived at the High House, after an absence of some six months, on Christmas eve, she really looked herself again. Hugh was there to receive her.

The young clergyman had contrived to come across her path at various points in her travels. He had made flying excursions north, south, east, and west, to get a few hours with her. Not so much through strength of intellect, or excellence of scholarship, as through the influence of private connection, the Rev. Hugh Argentine had got into the way of making a good many stray guineas with his pen; and as their entire aggregate would have been insufficient to buy him a living or even to furnish him a house, it cannot be said that he put the money to a bad use, when he expended it on coach-fare to get a few brief glimpses of Lucy.

"Miss Adenbrooke is quite herself again," proclaimed Mr. Simon Vincent, at the Traverse,

and the news was passed on in notes of acclamation to all 'the sets' in the village. That social entity, too, 'the neighbourhood,' comprising all those gentle families of the district who were within dining-with-each-other distance, received the intelligence with satisfaction.

Sir Everard picked up his good looks, and laughed again over his wine in the old cheery style. But from the events of that last year he never altogether recovered. His cheek was paler, and his brow more thoughtful. He never hunted again: not because he imagined a man could not die creditably in a scarlet coat; but because he at last recognised in himself an amount of bodily infirmity that made violent horse-exercise, at the best, a painful labour. He became somewhat graver in his deportment, always attending the divine service of the church twice every Sunday; whereas he had been in the habit of frequently absenting himself from the afternoon duty. He talked, too, of giving up his sporting paper, but the writer of these pages is glad to say Sir Everard never took that unwise step. He still shot with unerring precision; but it was observed that in his

shooting excursions he made much more use of Gossamer's back than in previous seasons.

"Pshaw!" said Mr. Costerton, nodding his head with great sagacity to his son, "there's a screw loose somewhere, and he knows it; or hard up as he is, he would be for buying a new hunter, and sending another fifty guineas to Colonel Adams for the hounds. What a mistake that man's life has been! Why he might, if he had only liked to look sharp, have been worth seven thousand a year, and bought out that old scoundrel, Lord Glanberris."

Mr. Costerton thought an English gentleman had every condition requisite for complete earthly happiness, if he could every ten years 'buy out' or 'sell up' one of his neighbours. And had the banker only lived in this prudent generation, no one would have thought him a mistaken or eccentric man.

"Ah!" concluded Mr. Costerton, devoutly, "I do hope the son will turn out as big a fool as the father."

CHAPTER IX.

OLD ENGLAND ONCE MORE.

“Old England once more!”

They were the words that came from Reginald Adenbroke’s lips, as he was carried on men’s shoulders to the generous soil of his motherland from the vessel which had conveyed him from India. He was worn and exhausted, with scarce more strength in his finely-shaped form than when Mrs. Vincent dandled him in her arms to the measure of a lullaby. But he spoke heartily; and a bright light—of triumph and of genuine patriotic affection—was in his eye.

There had been a little demonstration on

board, upon his quitting the passengers, to whom he had much endeared himself on the way home. Many of them were ladies, and they had conceived a strong interest for the young officer. “ You are going home to enjoy yourself,” he had said to some of the prettiest of them; “ I am going home to die.” And the women felt very tenderly to him, because they saw his words were true; because, moreover, his voice was winning and his face handsome. If his companions of the gentler sex were all the better inclined to him for being well-looking, the men thought none the worse of him for the same reason—and that’s not a little to say in his favour, and theirs also.

We are prone to judge mercifully a man on whose brow the arrow-head of death is set. Doubtless the manifest signs of the malady, (which was eventually to lay him in the grave) told greatly in Reginald’s favour,—causing the ladies to pity him because they loved him, and the men to like him, because they pitied him. Anyhow, the young soldier had won the heart of every person on board; and as he was carried from the couch, from which he had for

hours gazed at the white cliffs of the old island, to the landing-place, all the occupants of the floating castle formed in a double line, and gave him a cross fire of good wishes and cordial adieu as he passed between them.

India was quiet again, after terrible campaigns in which was displayed an amount of forgotten heroism that would have furnished material for a score Iliads. Wherever danger was to be faced, and honour won, Reginald had forced his way to the front. He was the last of his line to wear a sword, and his had been worn gallantly. Perhaps his courage had been little else but the recklessness of desperation; but it was not less effective in deed than in story. The truth is, he had gone out wishing for death, and was only disappointed in not finding it. And this did not arise from his having a glorious scorn of death, or a noble contempt of life. Certainly there were some points in his position, as the impoverished descendant, and, worse still, the impoverished *representative* of an old family, that (under any circumstances) would have infused a more than preponderating share of bitterness into existence. But all the

remote and immediate inconveniences of his ill-stored pocket would have been nothing to him, if his health had been good.

He had been imprudent, his friends said (whose friends don't say so?). At Eton, when he was a thin, slight stripling, he had thrown himself, with boyish ardour, into all the pursuits, and follies and vices of the place. Sir Everard had a theory (not a bad one in some respects—though moralists are very fond of knocking it about with their logic-mills) that a boy shouldn't be a milk-sop, that he should pick and choose for himself—learning to distinguish between good and evil by experience, and not by an infinite series of guide books, and homilies addressed to young men entering on life.

Such was the plan on which the baronet himself had been brought up; and though it had brought him into some few difficulties—like the good, honest, loyal Conservative that he was—he believed in the plan, and spoke well of it, because it was an old one, and sanctified by the usage of generations of his forefathers. He let his boy have more money

than was good for him at school. Some imprudent men are wonderfully far-seeing and economical in regulating the pecuniary affairs of their children—admirably *self*-denying in all expenses that don't immediately affect themselves. Sir Everard was not one of these. If his money rolled out from his coffers too fast, at least a full and liberal proportion of it, he was resolved, should roll in the direction of his boy. So the lad was plenteously supplied with cash—and he spent it liberally;—profusely and intemperately (not exactly knowing its value), with no regard to hygienic principles, or any other principles, save those of gentlemanly honour, in which it was impossible for an Adenbroke to be deficient. In the last generation young men were extravagant, having enormous bills with tailors, wine-merchants, dealers in pictures and horses, and other purveyors of necessaries. In the very best ranks of high society they would not unfrequently have their latch-keys made of gold. But all that is of the past, and, now-a-days, a young man of quality is as saving and stingy as any poor clerk in the Customs.

It must not be thought that Reginald killed himself with hard living. His error, or wisdom, was that he didn't preserve himself with tender usage—with the early hours, muffetees, abstemious diet, and waterproof goloshes from which the rising young men of 1860 derive so much benefit. The consequence was, that his constitution, in which lurked the seeds of consumption (hereditary in his mother's family), broke down ten or fifteen years sooner than it would have done under the moll-coddling system.

When Reginald received orders to proceed with his regiment from an unhealthy station in the West Indies to the scene of contest in our Eastern empire, he had already been assured, by competent authority, that he had not many years to live. The prospect of closing his days in a campaign stirred his blood, and caused him to be joyous as a child starting for a holiday. Since a selection between different modes of life was denied him, he was grateful to have a choice of deaths.

His malady was so far advanced that he might, without any risk of misrepresentation,

have returned home (on leave of absence) to be nursed into his grave. But that course was little to his mind. He gave no hint, in his letters to the High House, that he was not in vigorous health. In them there was nothing from which Sir Everard could suspect the state of the case, unless it was a something resembling exaggeration in the terms with which the writer insisted on his athletic prowess, and on his certainty that neither climate nor fatigue could hurt him. With a noble hypocrisy the young man went forth to seek a fate that was not to be his.

In that fine army how many gallant fellows were there who fought for honour—and only won a grave; whereas Reginald, intent in finding a grave, reaped only honour. The fierce excitement of the campaigns prolonged his days. Every new letter from the seat of war brought Sir Everard grateful intelligence of his boy—his daring, his promptness, his dexterity, and capacity for command. His name was so sure to figure in every despatch sent home by the commander-in-chief, that sagacious and amiable critics of public affairs said,

over their morning coffee, in London, that it was ‘a shame, a —— shame, that sort of puffing!’ which, in a very brief time it was discovered, was merely because ‘young Adenbroke’ had married a niece of the general in command. Sir Everard, fortunately, never heard any of these generous comments. He only saw that his boy was declared, by the highest authority, to be the most distinguished of the young soldiers in the British army. An observer could tell what news the paper contained by only looking at Sir Everard, and marking how, in the middle of a column, he’d clench his fist, and, bringing it down with a crash on the table, would look round about him for sympathy, breathing laboriously—his face purple with emotion—and almost disfigured with a too strong happiness, and his eyes dimmed with womanly tenderness and manly triumph.

So Reginald Adenbroke fought his way up; and, on the termination of hostilities, came home a colonel, and a C.B.

“By Jove, sir—by Jove, sir!” cried aloud, in Pall Mall, little Lumley, “that young

fellow's connections will dandle him into a peerage before he is fifty." Lumley had had, once on a time, the command of an expedition; but, somehow, he never got the offer of a second. So he went about town, whenever there was a stir in military affairs, swearing that 'there was an iniquitous combination amongst men in power not to give talent a chance, sir—not to give talent a chance, sir.' But, doubtless, Lumley was more comfortable with gall and vitriol in his heart's core than he would have been without such stimulants. "Heart-burning you say there'll be?" said an Irish gentleman, a short time since, to the writer of these pages; "by Jasus, and I trust there will! How can a man of spirit enjoy life without a deuced large quantity of heart-burning?"

When Reginald reached the High House, Sir Everard received him with a stoical calmness that contrasted strangely with the tenderness and fatherly love which he exhibited in the performance of those small acts of personal care which are supposed, most erroneously, by many people to be altogether beyond the

sphere of masculine capability. The old man never allowed himself to give way to sorrow in the presence of his son. He, too, had been a soldier; and now, in his old age, he resolved to show that he had not outlived his powers of enduring—bravely, as a soldier ought.

“Sir Everard,” said Reginald to his father, about ten days after his return to Sharsted, as he lay on a sofa in the drawing-room, with a view of the park stretching out before him, “I am not so strong as I was last week, in spite of all Anstey’s sanguine hopes.”

“Reginald,” answered Sir Everard, gruffly, “you sha’n’t die yet. The line sha’n’t come to an end.”

“It can’t close better, father. There is not a life of shame to be found in the whole length of it. And, thank God!—men say I have not diminished its honour.”

Sir Everard turned away his head, and left the room.

His place was soon taken by Lucy Aden-broke.

When Reginald’s eyes fell on his sister, he beckoned to her to come close to him, so

that he could speak to her without much exertion.

It was autumn. Every succeeding quarter of an hour made the blue of the clear, unclouded sky softer and more serene as the sun came round to the west, and slowly fell behind the wood. The red tints were on the trees, and through the open window came in the gentle air from the terrace. The brother and sister looked at the dark cedars beneath which, as children, they had often played; at the park, in which they had wandered—Reginald, as the senior by eight years, taking charge of the little, merry lass by his side. Then they turned their eyes to the church-spire that rose up above the trees on the hill-side.

“Lucy,” said the young man, “one thing makes me very happy at the thought of going from this pleasant place. I shall make room for a better man. Thank God! Hugh will be a good lord of the manor, and a kind friend for all the people on the estate. You’ll be very—happy;—I know you will. In the night, when I can’t sleep, I quiet myself with

fancying what your life will be here in the old High House,—years hence,—years hence. Lucy, darling, if you should ever have two sons—name one of them after me, and talk to him often about me when he is a child, and when he grows up—make him a soldier—and let him wear my sword.”

He did not feel the chill and the spasm that struck to Lucy's heart at these words. It was well he did not.

He did not see her an hour afterwards; when, in the solitude of her own room, she stood before her mirror pale, and panting, and scared, and so changed in aspect that she started from her semblance in the polished surface — fancying that some wild, wicked, frenzied creature had broken in upon her retirement.

“Oh, Father!” cried Lucy Adenroke, sinking on her knees, and clasping her hands together, “oh, dear Father in heaven, have mercy on me, and help me. Take that thought out of my heart. Take it out. For how many long months and years has it tortured me! Oh, take it out! I cannot endure it!” .

CHAPTER X.

FAIR PLAY OR FOUL.

THE agony of those minutes passed away from Lucy's mind; and so, for a while, did the thought which had occasioned it. Some few weeks afterwards she remembered it, and then she was surprised that she had so readily dismissed it from her consciousness; was surprised that it had not more deeply influenced her; was surprised that it bore the appearance of an old, old memory, separated from her by the interval of long years—instead of weeks.

To her brother, Lucy Adenbroke was an exemplary nurse. Noiseless, and watchful, and delicate of touch, she ministered to him, sitting, as he grew worse, by his side in the

silent watches of the night. Never tired, fresh in air and comeliness, full of cheery, musical gossip, enlivening but never agitating, she was his constant companion by day. Scarce a morning came that something new was not devised to please his eye, and break the monotony of his hours with a sense of variety. None but a woman's head could have devised all the schemes that Lucy, without a word, put in action to effect this good purpose. She frequently changed her mode of dressing her hair; never two days running did she wear the same colours; the ingenuity with which she diversified the arrangement of the flowers in the drawing-room was equal to that with which she found a new topic for every hour; for each of the six days of the week she had a distinct occupation, as she sat at her table busily employed with drawing, or painting, or wool-work, or some other graceful form of feminine waste-time—feigning a deep interest in what she was about, so that the invalid lying on the sofa amidst his pillows, might not be induced to think that he was a wearisome charge to her.

Sir Everard and Aunt Mabel looked on. They could do nothing, those two old people—except conceal their despair. They exchanged glances when the young people were present, and possibly words when they were away. Every day Reginald was borne on a couch—put on wheels, and dragged by a sturdy Shetland pony—into the park to enjoy the warm, balmy air, which moved like tranquil gladness through the sombre avenues. Old Andrew, the gardener, walked at the pony's head during these excursions, and Lucy paced by the side of the chair, talking to her brother. Often they would pause under an old tree, or at a favourite point of view, and then the sister would sit down by the dying man's side, whilst Andrew, taking up a position at some yards' distance, would watch the two like a faithful, scarred, ragged shepherd's dog. Then gazing before and around them, at the green turf of the park,—brown only at the spots where the cattle congregated under the timber,—at the church lying hid in the trees laden with dense foliage, at the old walls and pinnacles of the High House (shaded by the black

cedars, and touching the blue firmament), the brother and sister would remain for many pleasant minutes enjoying the perfume of the sinless earth, and listening to the rustle of the swaying leaves and to the cawing of the rooks, and recalling from the time of childhood incidents and sensations, from which all of pain had vanished, and of which all that was lovely appeared clear and distinct as the life of yesterday.

Sir Everard, too, would be in the park—but at a distance and unseen. Sauntering under the cover of a skirting plantation, the old man would turn his pale and subdued face in the direction of his children, watching the slow course of the invalid's chair, and the slight tall figure of his daughter.

One can imagine the course that Reginald's thoughts took during those excursions.

He remembered a little boy, a wild bold urchin, whose first toys were a pony and dog and gun,—courageous, mischievous, and overbearing. At one moment the boy would be in the cricket-field, at another riding with the hounds—talking a knowing prattle by the covert-side,

or with delight in his eyes galloping along in the full cry. Whatever the amusement of the hour was, the gallant urchin lived wholly in it, never looking beyond it or even to the end of it; thinking it the one solitary thing in all the wide world to be cared for—whether it chanced to be a holiday into the woods, a dance, a concert, or a review.

Recollections of the first bursting of poetic pleasure in his ardent mind came next, and he could remember how he had with a beating heart fashioned bald uncouth verses,—such tame, feeble, unmeaning couplets six months after they were penned; but fervid, and tempestuous, and weighty with significance, when mis-shapen and grotesque they first struggled from his brain!

One day he paused at a high lumbering gate, that divided the home park from what a century before, in the palmy days of the High House, was the deer-park; and he gazed at the ragged timber of its ledges with surprise and satisfaction, as a careless wanderer on the sea-shore looks down on a precious stone that he has found unsought, amidst the shingle.

"What is it?" Lucy asked.

"Look there," replied Reginald, putting his thin hand into a large notch cut in the topmost rail.

"Well?"

Reginald's eyes brightened, and his voice deepened, as he answered—"Lucy, when I was a school-boy I did that. I was some years out of childhood then. It was just such a fair serene day as this in the Eton vacation, when I spent the morning by the water—reading a book I had not been taught to read much at school. I can't recall what it was that induced me to start out with a fishing-rod in my hand, and a Bible in my pocket. But this I know that as I sat by the water a dread fell on me that I should be a bad man. Under that very tree there, Lucy,—the old ash that is withered and dying like me,—I kneeled and prayed as I have never done since. Then I came up to this old gate, and I said, 'I'll make a sign on it, so that when I see it I may remember my resolution to be a good man.' You can think what chapter I had been reading that put it into my heart to make a vow—and register it

by a sign. So I took my knife from my pocket, and cut that very same mark. For some weeks—till the holidays came to an end—I came daily to my sign to look at it, and ponder over it. The poor dear old father wondered why I was so grave, and swore that I was ill. I can remember it all now. And yet from that time to this I have forgotten all about the sign—and all about the resolution too."

This stirring recollection called up other memories.

A gloom came over his face, and a reeling disorderly rout of follies and sins crossed the arena of his thought—like a pageant of riotous bacchanals. The roar of cities and their intoxicating enjoyments! Troops of wanton girls dancing to voluptuous music, brilliant galleries where men assembled to feast and ruin each other on a system, deeds of senseless violence done by wanderers through a maze of streets in which flaring temples added darkness to the shades of night, close stifling rooms where gentlemen of noble names and untarnished honour countenanced the brutal pleasures of ruffians and debauchees!—

Pah ! such ghastly phantasmagoria *will* trouble gentlemen in their failing hours.

From that day Reginald took his sister yet more into his confidence. He was rapidly growing weaker,—and in moments of weakness even men want sympathy. There were a few troublous points on his conscience,—and though he was too delicate and high-minded a man to whisper or hint aught that could shock a lady's taste or offend her purity, he found solace in disburthening his mind of smaller secrets—not calculated to rouse shame or even regret in a sister's heart. If ever, my brother, you wish for a confessor,—do as Reginald did.

One great revelation Reginald made, that caused Lucy no longer to wonder how calmly he looked forward to closing his days in the prime of manhood.

The time was rather later than that at which he usually retired to rest, but the candles had not been lit, and the room in which he had passed the evening was illumined only with the dim light of such scant weak rays as a young moon managed to pour

through the gaps of the cedars. For an hour or more Reginald had been bringing before his view the friends of old times. A queer medley they were,—and somehow the quaintest of them persisted in peopling the retrospect. There was a murky desolate street, jammed up between an Inn of Court and an hospital, and unable to boast in all its begrimed windows a single square inch of decent white blind. Why, he hadn't been into that muddy alley for a dozen years. Yet there it was—with the room which the attorney-general had by that time forgotten he ever inhabited, when he ate dinners at the Mitre on credit, and regarded his tailor with as much pity as surprise. What a nest of good fellows that room once was!

How some of them had altered! Little Hills, who never left his quarters by daylight, unless it was to meet the hounds, and always gave his friends two good stories for every tumbler of grog he allowed himself, had turned fat and sleepy—and dropped into a family living. Clever Houghton was associated in the public mind with enquiries in the Bank-

ruptcy courts. Dry, lank, taciturn, Wycherley, whom every merry dog made a butt of, was a leader of his profession—and on the eve of rising to the Bench. Garrulous Welby was beyond the reach of creditors at Sierra Leone. Parkes, who never wore waistcoat or necktie in January, had gone to Hongkong. Littleton, who made those awful startling speeches at the United Advocates, was in Australia, and had achieved a colonial reputation by killing in fair duel three foremen of juries who had ventured to utter verdicts in opposition to his opinions of right. Songs sweetly sung and long forgotten, boyish rivalries, sentiment and dandyism, and a host of trifling fancies—startling the invalid by their re-appearance, simply because they were so insignificant!

“Lucy—mind me—but don’t be frightened,” said Reginald, cutting short the current of reverie. “Some years since, when you little thought of it, I was within an ace of committing a great crime—and yet nearer losing my life. I was only two-and-twenty when it

happened. I fell in love with a girl. What fools men are!—they all do so. I soon found my suit was not likely to prosper, for there was a man in the field against me, who was my equal in all things, and greatly my superior in one—the advantage which six additional years of commerce with the world give to one young man over another in the outset of life. How I hated that man! I fancied he made sport of my weakness, and only paid his addresses to the girl for the sake of teaching me how greatly I was beneath him. And I do to this day believe that to some extent I was right, and that he loved her so ostentatiously only to insult me. What do you think I resolved to do?"

"I can't tell, dear. To forgive him?"

"To murder him."

"Reginald—Don't, I beg you,—"

Reginald laughed lightly. "Poor Lucy, I wont scare you. I wish that moon up there was a little bigger, or that we had a lamp, for I should like to see your face."

"Go on, dear," answered Lucy, nestling

closer to him in the dark corner, “I am not afraid; I wish to hear.”

Her heart was beating fast—but not from terror.

“I picked a quarrel with him, and forced him to challenge me. Duels are not so frequent now as they were ten years since, and it would be a good thing if they could be altogether done away with. When I took this step I thought his *affaire* had gone no further than first advances. I did not imagine she loved him,—still less did I suspect that she had accepted him. Like a jealous and a prudent man I only wanted to make my game secure, by removing a dangerous antagonist. It was arranged that we were to meet on the following morning. That settled, I went to call on the Dalilah who had caused all the trouble. She received me with the intelligence that she had news for me. ‘Indeed! what is it?’ I asked.—‘I am engaged to Captain Moorfield—your friend!’—I laughed, ‘You have made quick time of it—at least if I am not mistaken!’ ‘Then mis-

taken you are. We have been engaged for a twelvemonth, but I am so young—such a *child*, as mamma calls me!—that we were bound over to keep the peace, and not say a word about it till to-day. You are the first person I have told of it by word of mouth—so you may think yourself complimented. But, bless me, why are you so pale?' I answered with a laugh, 'Oh, nothing!—I was only concerned for you. Perhaps if you hadn't been so precipitate, you might have had me for—a husband. But, indeed, I do sincerely wish you joy.'

"Here was a nice young fool! As to explaining to Moorfield, that was out of the question. To have confessed the whole story would have made me the laughing-stock of the whole of my world. Men, you know, dread ridicule almost as much as women do. And moreover, a glass of wine flung in a man's face at a mess table, isn't to be wiped up with a sentence of dainty words. But I resolved not to be a *villain*. The next day Moorfield and I met. We tossed, and he got

the first shot. I was glad of that. He fired, and I just felt a short quick tap in my chest, and caught myself staggering. He was a good fellow, and (as he told me afterwards—when we were once again friends,) had meant to hit my pistol-arm, but missed, and sent his ball under one of my pectoral muscles. I recovered myself instantly—and fired into the air. ‘Adenbroke,’ said my second, ‘are you mad?’ ‘No, not mad; but too good a Christian to wish to take the life of a man who has done his best to kill me.’ Then I contrived to walk up to Moorfield and say, ‘Old fellow, I was a great fool yesterday; and I heartily beg your pardon. Shake hands with me.’ That was the only duel I ever fought in my life.”

As he finished his story, in the low weak voice of an invalid, he took his sister’s hand, and guided it under the folds of his shirt-front, till she felt her fingers touch a locket. “There’s some of her hair,” observed Reginald, “in that toy which rests just on the spot where Moorfield’s bullet came out. Mind,

dear, don't let it ever leave me. It'll be a litter anywhere. So it may as well be with me—out of the way."

"Reginald, don't speak so sneeringly. I know she must have been *worthy* of you," put in Lucy, falling into woman's stock phraseology on what she deemed the most delicate and interesting of all subjects. "She must have been worthy of you, or you wouldn't wear that."

"Lor, Lucy!" returned Reginald, having recourse once more to his bantering tone; "how should she have been worthy of me? She was too good for Moorfield—who, by the by, used to grumble a great deal about her extravagance. But for a woman to be worthy of me,—she must be a long way out of the common run!"

Finding her brother so resigned and cheerful at the approach of death, it was natural for Lucy to feel none of that poignant grief which she would have experienced, had he proceeded on his downward course with gloom and consternation. To look away from the subject was impossible, when it was the point to which

every word he uttered, and every sign of his malady, directed attention. And looking at it, how was Lucy Adenbroke to avoid looking beyond it,—more especially as Reginald persisted in drawing fair pictures of the felicity in store for her in after days? She could not do otherwise than mentally acquiesce with her brother, when he reminded her how his death would remove every obstacle that stood in the way of her marriage with Hugh. She, of course, made honest efforts not to revert too frequently to this topic. But Reginald's illness was so long and wearisome, that not to have looked forward at all would have been to cut herself off from the pleasures of hope —for very many months.

Moreover, she had for the two preceding years undergone a dangerous education, having had so much practice in the art of measuring the size of dead men's shoes, that she was secure from the horror and soul-sickness which a novice feels on his first apprenticeship to the powers of evil. The bravest will tremble on first going into action, and sometimes the boldest will turn pale at the sight of blood. But Lucy

was too old a soldier for such qualms. And don't let us be too severe upon her,—though her heart was spacious enough for love of herself as well as love of her brother. A woman, when she ventures on marriage, may well be somewhat cold and calculating. The ceremony to a man is little more than a passing tribute of respect to the affections, which he pays reverently—because it is his duty to pay it; just as he surrenders to the queen her dues, stands up for the cause of public morals, and once in five years delivers a lecture at a Mechanics' Institute. He may make a fool of himself in his selection, only securing himself against the painful mischances of his lady turning out worse or poorer than when he found her; he may, as the phrase goes, *throw himself away*: but he can right himself at any hour of the day,—even at the eleventh he can neglect his wife, and cultivate avarice. But the period of wooing and betrothal is woman's only seed-time; and all the after life is a harvest—of grapes or thistles.

Dear young lady, don't throw aside this tale in disgust. The day is not far distant

when you'll find its words true. This prophet is no false one. At least, if he lies, his lies are on the side of truth—only being too emphatic declarations of stern facts. Are you sixteen summers old?—take him on trust till you are eighteen. Are you incredulous now, at sweet eighteen?—don't be so positive against him till you are twenty. Are you twenty?—wait a little longer; experience comes fast between twenty and twenty-two. Are you twenty-five?—you've waited long enough, and in heart are with the writer, whatever your prudish lips may say.

In the winter, the thread of Reginald's existence had worn so thin, that his friends were surprised it did not break. Had anxiety to live been added to the weight by which it was strained, it would have snapped. Hugh came down in the blithe Christmas-tide to see Lucy, and take a farewell of the first and dearest friend of his boyhood. He paid his visit, and returned to town—thinking, I doubt not, of 'his expectations.' Not one syllable of allusion or hint relating to the future passed between him and Lucy. But

as they sat together, a voice whispered in the ear of either,—“What next? what next?”

“Lucy,” said Dr. Anstey, one day after Hugh had taken his departure, “this day fortnight I don’t think Reginald will be with us. He has not now been out for a month. He’ll soon go out for the last time.”

“What, so soon? I will remember, dear Dr. Anstey. Thank you.”

But Reginald Adenbroke did not die at the end of a fortnight. As Dr. Anstey seldom made predictions, he was not altogether pleased at being so manifestly deceived by appearances. “Gad, sir,” said an irritable physician, convicted of a similar mistake not long since,—“annoyed at that man not dying, you accuse me of being? Well, sir, and haven’t I a right to be annoyed? Surely *my* reputation is of more consequence than the life of that old man!”

Reginald not only rallied slightly; but he gained so much strength, and lost so much of his cough, that he seemed another man. When the spring winds softened (and in that year they amiably consented to depart with

the commencement of April, instead of tarrying till the middle of June, as they usually do), he was out again in the park; not, however, in the invalid's chair, but on the back of Gossamer. Dr. Anstey was so impressed with the change that he said, "With such powers of self-restoration, his constitution may yet accomplish great things. Let us keep him here till the close of summer, and then send him off to a warmer climate. He'll never make a strong man; but it is possible to patch him up even yet."

Aunt Mabel's eyes beamed like a young girl's; and Sir Everard stamped his foot on the carpet, and swore that Anstey was destined to be the salvation of the Adenbrokes in the male line. Lucy covered her face with her hand, and left the room.

"Poor dear girl," said Aunt Mabel, softly, "the good news is too much for her. She has gone away to be alone, and thank God for it by herself. And I'll go and do so too."

"By——," said Sir Everard, nervously, "next to you, Anstey, that girl has been the means of saving my boy. She has tended on

him like a slave. Night and day, she has been by his side. Lord, Anstey, I don't deserve it! I am an old, weather-beaten, time-worn, selfish man, who have thrown away all my chances in life. But how good God is to me! My son is a hero,—and my daughter an angel."

And having been guilty of this outburst of strong emotion, Sir Everard passed his hands through his snowy hair, and wiped his eyes with his rough coat-sleeves, and then swore that he was a maudlin old fool, fit only for a nursery of second childhood.

From that day a mournful change came over Lucy Adenbroke.

Her brother's comparative restoration, instead of exhilarating, seemed strangely to depress her. A cloud sat continually on her mild brow, and in her own secret self she recognised the first advances of that nervous derangement which in the previous year had so cruelly afflicted her, and reduced her almost to the condition of the unreasoning. But she concealed her indisposition as well as she was able.

"Poor girl!" thought Aunt Mabel; "the exertions she has made for so many months are now beginning to tell upon her. She has borne up bravely; but now the reaction, following on her long efforts, will try her terribly."

Sir Everard was too triumphantly happy at the change for the better in his son, to think of anything else. And even Reginald, small reason though he had for loving life, was for a time so wrought upon by the re-assurances of his physician, that he began to busy himself with schemes for escaping from the jaws of the grave, and with the egotism of convalescence thought of nothing but his own bodily symptoms.

What!—had, then, her brother's apparent recovery and the death of old Mark Cudworth affected Lucy in the same manner?—Had the same sense of disappointment come to her from both events?—a disappointment of which an overwhelming horror at her own baseness and keen remorse (acting on a delicate and highly-tuned intellectual and moral nature, till she was driven almost to madness) were

consequences?—Yes:—a hopeless life and a hopeless eternity extended before her. Unwed, childless, and disappointed, she must tarry on the earth till the sum of her days should be accomplished, and then—(and then?)—by her *thoughts* she would be judged.

But Lucy Adenbroke was no longer a child,—no longer a timid girl, trusting others rather than herself.

She had acquired the art of concealing terrible passion, and yet more fearful anguish. Gentle, and lovely, and womanly—in every action, and modulation of voice, and expression of feeling, a type of that grace and goodness which every man, not besotted to utter worthlessness, holds to be the most sacred elements of human life,—she was so fair a creature, a thing of such fond delight to look upon, it was hard to believe that in her white virgin breast rankled the poison of devils.

Ere the autumn came, Reginald had a serious relapse; and the very day, on which he had arranged to sail from England's shores to a warmer climate, saw him in the last ex-

tremity. He had for forty-eight hours been hovering between life and death, when he fell off into a short doze. The hour was one past midnight, and the only watcher by his side was Lucy. She had sent Nurse Vincent off to sleep for a few hours, and was sitting speechless and attentive beside the bed, nigh which she had kept so many vigils.

High upon the pillows lay the sick man's handsome face,—his throat bared, and his bust resembling a mass of sculpture, and the black beard and whisker, and crisp jet hair, contrasting well with the whiteness of his countenance, and the linen in which it was embedded. A shaded lamp stood on a table by the sleeper's head, and close to it lay his watch ticking out the moments that draw heedless men to eternity. On the table was a bottle containing a narcotic draught. Similar draughts Lucy had so often before had under her keeping, that she had acquired great skill and nicety in apportioning her doses to the requirements of her patient.

“Mind, Miss Lucy,” Dr. Anstey had said

that night, “you must be very careful with your opiate to-night. Reginald is so exhausted, that if you give him an over-dose, I don’t think he’d recover from its effects. Mind, only give him the half of his ordinary quantity,—that is, just a quarter of what is in the bottle.”

Tick! tick! tick!—went the watch.

Lucy looked round the room, and marked with what distinctness she saw the colours of the carpet, the pattern of the paper, the carving of the oak wardrobe on the distant side of the apartment, the folds of the curtains, and the forms of an old tapestry screen that stood before the door. Reginald’s breath was short, each breath coming almost as quickly as a beat of the watch on the table. Lucy had a book by her side—her mother’s Bible; but the type worried her eyes, cutting her nerves of vision, with the sharp corners and clear edges of its letters. The fire was brilliantly a-glow, but it had no blaze, and along the rims of the bars lay ridges of white ashes. When awful thoughts close over disturbed mortals, it is strange to what minute and insignificant things they pay especial attention.

Tick! tick! tick!—and deeper silence!
Not a breath of wind on the terrace!
The cedars as still as the grass they covered.

“Lucy Adenbroke,” said a voice behind the fragile girl, “if he should die to-night you would be an heiress. The High House and the family estate would descend to you. Your father is an old man, and he’ll be only too happy when his boy is no more, to have your husband—whom he already loves tenderly—his daily companion here. Your brother can never enjoy life. The utmost he can, under any circumstances, attain to, will be the power of running from one part of the world to another, guarding his feeble health from destruction. How calm, and still, and peaceful he would lie in the grave. Then no more agonizing, wearing delay to you. You would live on in your own happy home, the mistress of it—with your husband and your babes around you. Think of Hugh pining and wasting out his life in lonely expectancy. Would you not have him with you? his royal face and gentle lips? his frank-smiling, thoughtful eyes, and the music of his voice? Are you

for ever to lead the cheerless life you've endured for so long past?"

Lucy looked round over her shoulder to stare down and defy the devil who would have mocked her towards the path that leads to hell. So completely did she believe herself to have heard the words, that she expected to find behind her a bodily form from which they might have proceeded.

From this fruitless search she was recalled by her brother saying in low soft tones, "Lucy, darling, I am awake; come here, I want you."

She rose hastily and went to his side.

"I sha'n't trouble you much longer, dear," he said slowly. "Mind, don't call any one. I am going to sleep, and I sha'n't open my eyes again. God bless you, dear, for all your goodness and love to me. God bless Hugh; and—and—Lucy, remember my locket. You know."

She went to the large table that stood in the centre of the room, and mixed her brother a cooling draught. He drank down the medicine quietly and obediently like a little child, put his arm for a few moments round his sister's neck, kissed her fair cheek tenderly twice, and again,

—and then fell back upon his pillow with visions of long-past days—the joys and errors, the ambitions and failures of his baffled life—pursuing each other over his moistened eyes.

Soon his eyelids closed in slumber.

Then Lucy quickly left the room, and running to Nurse Vincent told her to despatch a messenger for Dr. Anstey. When she came back she found her brother still in tranquil repose, and, resuming her seat, she continued her night watch.

Tick, tick, tick!—louder, louder, louder went the time piece! and quicker and less audible was the breathing of her brother! There seemed to be a contest between the inspirations and tickings, the latter getting the day by sound, and the former trying to gain the victory by speed. Then the battle was waged less vigorously on the losing side,—fitfully,—and then not at all.

Tick, tick, tick! went the watch. It did not stop, though no other sound was audible.

“What,” said the doctor, gently, coming into the room to lead Lucy from the post where she was no longer wanted, “then he did not require any composing draught?”

The doctor made this allusion to the vial that stood uncorked and full on the table, for the sake of diverting Lucy's attention. At first she did not understand the words. So the physician repeated them.

Then she started, and gazed on him suspiciously—and with terror.

"Take my hand, dear," said the doctor, firmly and tenderly, "and let me lead you from this place. You can do no good now. He will not need that draught."

"No, doctor, he will not," said Lucy, quietly, following whither she was conducted,—"he has gone to sleep without it."

CHAPTER XI.

PREFERMENT.

THEY took the young man and bore him beneath the cedars, under whose shadow he had played and slept and played again in childhood, over the fair park on which he was to look no more, to the quiet church whose pavement concealed the ashes of many of his ancestors. It was an imposing procession; the gentry of the county side, sitting in their carriages, the tenantry and burly yeomanry, for miles round, on horseback, and bringing up the rear on foot the domestic servants of the High House—and the humble inhabitants of the village. To these last it seemed that Providence, in removing

their 'young master' from the world, was giving a warning of peculiar solemnity to the entire human family.

Lucy watched the long train, till it disappeared amidst the trees. In the church Hugh Argentine read in clear, manly tones, the burial service; but a more touching homily on the vanity of man's passage here on earth than that most pathetic epitome of a Christian's faith, was the aspect of old Sir Everard—standing bowed and submissive, with long white locks covering his face, and hiding the womanly tears he could not restrain.

For just a month there was in Sharsted an excitement of woe for the loss of Reginald Adenbrooke, and at the close of another month there was a feeling of genuine regret for him. When the third month approached its termination, the courtiers of that little world were looking about for a new heir apparent,—and their loving hearts were pining for a new love.

It must not be thought that Lucy Adenbrooke did not sincerely mourn her brother's death. She did regret it poignantly and unfeignedly.

Nor was her grief a transitory emotion. Day after day, and night after night, for many a week, there rose before her out of nothingness *his* calm pallid face,—as she had seen it on that last night of his life. Wherever she turned her eyes, that picture met them—the flowers in the garden and the shadows on the lawn shaping it fancifully, as the darkness fashioning it terribly. That ghastly vision haunted her years afterwards. She could neither close her eyes to it, nor harden her heart to it, nor nerve her courage to endure it.

But when the early months of the year following Reginald's death had flown, the High House was more cheerful than it been for many a day. With that happy faculty of enjoying the lees of existence which old people possess in a degree that puzzles the young, Sir Everard began to entertain new hopes. Philosophers in the old Heathen, and divines in this Christian world, have described man's earthly life as a tavern, in which the traveller obtains only brief entertainment. It is like an inn in another respect. No one values its unjustly-depreciated

comforts so highly as the old wayfarer who is told that 'time is up,' and that buttoning coat and cape he must leave warm ingle, blazing fire and cheering cup, and turn out into the cold and uncertain night. He had lost a son, thought Sir Everard to himself, but his daughter still remained, and the brief remnant of his days should be spent in doing and sacrificing everything in his power to secure her happiness. So the old man, with the cordial approval of Aunt Mabel, formed a plan, of which the immediate residence in the High House of Hugh and Lucy—as a young married couple—formed a principal part.

When this proposition was communicated to the lady whom it especially concerned, her eyes brightened with satisfaction, and her heart beat fast, and the blood springing from it threw such a carmine into her soft face, that Sir Everard put his arms over her neck, and cried with delight, "God bless you—girl. You—you—look as you did five years ago."

And Aunt Mabel, who stood by a mute and pleased spectator of this scene, pondered over

her brother's words, and said to herself on retiring to her private room, "That's the first time Everard has ever said a word to let me know that he remarked the change in the dear girl. I almost fancied he hadn't observed how strange, and grave, and pensive she has grown. But, lor, men are just as tender and watchful for others as we women—only it isn't their habit to boast about it."

On Hugh being asked what he thought of a proposal that he should resign his London curacy in the course of a few months, and reside in the High House, as the husband of the girl he had loved through many years of poverty and toil and disappointment, we may be sure that his heart bounded with joy. He was still young, but Time—no, not Time! but care and hope deferred and mental anguish—had so affected him, that when he sat down to write his letter of reply to Lucy, he was surprised to find his hand trembling with an agitation such as he had not felt for years. At the first emotion he laughed, as some men do at all that's best in themselves; and at the second—

he turned aside, and lay on his sofa, and was for some minutes little better than an hysterical girl.

He wanted a cordial to restore him to his usual equanimity; and it came in a letter brought him by the post. It was a business epistle, and therefore, out of respect to business, must be copied in full.

“Long’s Hotel, Bond Street,
“Wednesday morning.

“Dear Hugh Argentine—

“I am in town for a few days. This morning comes a letter from my people telling of the death of poor Roper. He’s gone at last—day before yesterday, at half-past 4 P.M. So I send this line to say the living is yours—on condition that you don’t thank me for it, and will take out a license to shoot every season you hold it. Go down to old Sir Everard, if you like, and tell him you’ve got £800 a year; but don’t come near me—I hate grateful friends. Not that I’ve had much experience in them. But I’ve had one or two of that kind, and they nearly drove me mad. Depend upon it, ‘what-

ever is is right.' Although you're a parson,
don't try to make the world better.

"Your affectionate friend,

"CHARLES BERNIE.

"P.S.—By the way, tell Sir Everard I
have sent him a small case of brandy—such as
I haven't fallen upon since he and I were young
men together."

CHAPTER XII.

ON CERTAIN THINGS THAT RELATE TO MATRIMONY, AND ON A FEW THINGS THAT DON'T.

WHEN Hugh reached the High House (he had just received a quarter's stipend from his rector, and he spent it like a prince, in posting down to Sharsted), the intelligence, of which he was the bearer, created a sensation that was in proportion to the importance of the news.

Sir Everard laughed and smacked his lips, as if he had already made trial of the coming brandy. While Hugh and the baronet were shaking hands (both of them, it is to be feared, thinking much more of the eight hundred per annum than of the duties to be performed for

it), Aunt Mabel ran up to Lucy, and having kissed her half-a-hundred times in a quarter of that number of seconds, hastened off to tell the glad tidings to Mistress Vincent, who happened at that very moment to be in the High House, inspecting the condition of Aunt Mabel's lavender bags and preserve pots.

Nurse Vincent had for two generations been Mabel Adenbroke's peculiar confidante. To Nurse the lady laid bare her thoughts on the chief events of her quiet life. From the doll of her nursery days, to the 'particular friend' of her school experiences, up to that noble being 'my lord and master' (as she calls him with bewitching irony), or, ascending yet higher in the scale of creation, to the fat spaniel, or sleepy cat, or sage loquacious parrot of widowhood, a woman must have a sympathizing companion. 'Tis much the same with men, only they don't want the sympathy so much as the relief of talking. Some growl out their troubles to a very black pipe or a heavy ledger, others to a good honest brick wall. A few are selfish enough to tell the tale of their anxieties to their wives.

"And what say you, Lucy?" inquired Hugh, disengaging himself from the veteran.

There was a dark cloud over the girl's brow, and the colour had left her face, and the lips—of which we frankly spoke our admiration on first seeing the young lady—were white as the lace collar round her neck.

"What say you, Lucy? Don't you join with me in singing 'Better late than never'?"

"Hugh," answered the girl slowly, in a hollow voice most unlike her ordinary tones, "I say '*Better never than so late as this.*' I say it is too late—too late to save."

"How too late?—to save what?"

He advanced to put his arms round her and caress her; but she rose up to her full height, and regarded him for a few moments with a mixed expression of fear and defiance, as she said,—

"To save something worth more than the whole world; to save a soul alive."

"Darling, you know not what you say," answered Hugh, little fancying what her words meant; "our past poverty and disappointment did not kill him; neither, if years

back we had been as fortunate as we are now, would he have been alive this day?"

She was about to reply, when her mood changed. Her scared angry face became once more gentle and endearing. Taking Hugh's outstretched hand, she kissed it, making confession and asking pardon. She had been foolish and unreasonable; it was her duty to keep a better control over her feelings; she should be better now;—oh! much, much better, now that she was so soon to be his wife.

Good luck never makes a single visit, 'tis said. Not a month after Mr. Bernie had presented him with a good living, the Crown gave Hugh a canonry worth a sound twelve hundred pounds per annum.

Here was a change for Hugh Argentine! long waited for, but at the last coming suddenly, and bringing him wealth and position such as, since the death of Mark Cudworth, he had not hoped to acquire.

Popular as he was amongst the Sharsted 'set,' he had not escaped a certain amount of that distrust and commiserating disdain which the rich and well placed are so prone to feel

for the poor and the unfortunate. If he was low-spirited or quick of temper on any chance occasion, the county ladies (forgetting all about their own little fits of ‘the vapours’ and games of cross-purpose) attributed his tetchiness or gloom to his trying circumstances. Once, at a dinner-party, given by that very important personage, Sir Percy Easton, he ran counter in a political conversation to the prejudices of his rather unenlightened but thoroughly well-bred auditors. Of course he was a fool to have an opinion of his own, and deserved reproof for displaying it earnestly ; but surely it was rather too bad of old Lady Marcus Anthill, simply because the young man expressed a strong sympathy for the Wallachians, to give it as her opinion to the ladies, when they had retired to the drawing-room, that Mr. Argentine was fast becoming an *embittered* and *disappointed* man.

“ But it always is so,” observed the elegant dowager, laying a marked emphasis on all her gloomy adjectives, and tripping over the rest of her sentences in a sweet lazy voice that made her hearers think alternately of Anda-

lusian love-songs and slumber—"it always is so. It's one of the saddest things in all this world. One sees such numbers of intellectual fine young men, but in time they all get embittered and disappointed. They get into a morbid state—quite a morbid state—about wrong and oppression, and a host of other evils which are quite imaginary in a Christian country. Their heads are always in a fever about slaves, and populations, and injustice—and all things of an unpleasant sort. It's thinking of their own misfortunes that upsets them. When Mr. Argentine was talking so morbidly and extravagantly about the Wallachians, he was really pitying poor curates. It is such a pity! I am so very sorry for him!"

Lady Marcus had no small social influence, and she deserved it, for throughout life she was an exemplary woman. She gave bountifully to charity, wasn't angry with her daughters for being prettier than herself, and adored the king—hating the prince regent. She lived to see the death of her sainted monarch, and the coronation of the wicked prince; and then,

like a good creature, who hated all morbid views, she adored George IV. on earth as much as she had in former days adored his sainted sire. As a discreet patrician matron she spoke with authority. Her sentiments regarding Hugh found many to echo them. It was whispered that Lucy Adenbroke was a foolish imprudent girl; that she would live to repent her folly; that it was clearly her duty not only to herself but her father, to make an alliance that should restore the position of her family. And she was a foolish girl. Who could doubt it? She had given her heart to a penniless priest, when with her beauty she might have won a wealthy squire.

But there was a great difference between Hugh Argentine waiting without a shilling in his pocket for preferment that declined to come, and Canon Argentine with a good two thousand a-year of his own. Hugh was regarded in a new light,—a light much better than the dingy twilight of penury, for showing to best advantage his comeliness and charms. All floating sinister rumours died away. Lady Marcus said in confidence to her friends, that

'she had always predicted good things of Hugh Argentine. During all his long trials he had never been morbid or embittered. There was never the slightest trace of disappointment in him.'

"And after all, it turns out, Lady Marcus," said fair Emily Estwicke, laughing with her blue mischievous eyes, "that Lucy hasn't played her cards badly."

"Well, Emily," returned the lady, with the most perfect good humour, "she has won a good trick."

"And won it fairly, too," exclaimed the vivacious Emily.

"Pshaw!" put in Admiral Estwicke, looking with indescribable pride and contempt at his daughter, "there you are again, Emily, trusting to appearances. It is not all gold that glitters."

Estwicke was the best-natured fellow alive, and as stupid as he was good-natured. Naturally, therefore, it was his vanity to be reputed a cynic and a far-seeing observer.

"What can you mean, papa?" cried Emily.

"Ha! ha! I'm too old a bird to be caught

with chaff,'" responded the burly old man, looking as clever and humorous as an elephant when it rings a bell and asks for buns. "Mark me, I don't say that your friend Lucy has played unfairly. Mark me, I don't say your friend Lucy has won falsely. But appearances won't deceive me. Your old father, at his time of life, is not going to be caught by the outside of things."

This incredulity in 'the outside of things' had gained for the admiral, amongst his immediate associates, credit for being a man of uncommonly sound judgment.

Emily laughed heartily at her papa's words. She was in one of her merriest and most lovable moods that morning. When her peal of laughter was at an end, she ran up to papa, and kissed him, calling him 'her dear droll old man,' a compliment that the sire evidently enjoyed. Was Emily thinking that, as she was to be one of Lucy's bridesmaids, she should require *carte blanche* to get what she herself wanted for the august ceremony of her friend's wedding, and a cheque (not a mean shabby one, admiral,—girls are not married

every day of their lives) for her little *cadeau* to dearest Lucy?

Ladies, do you want to know all about the wedding, the number of the guests, the garniture of the rooms, the names of the bridesmaids, and what they wore, and how they looked, and whether they cried? Had the bride a veil of costly lace? and did she wear diamonds? Surely it wasn't a private affair, huddled over as if the chief actors were ashamed of it. Did Lucy Adenbroke sleep soundly the night before her execution (prisoners sometimes do)? Did the bells ring out cheerily from the church,—over silent dust hidden in graves, over beeches, and chestnuts, and walnuts, and oaks,—shaking with their merry clang the breasts of the pigeons on the roof of the High House? Had the bride and her blushing, trembling, triumphant attendants to walk under the cedars, along the terraces, and over the park—the way being covered with flowers scattered by the Sharsted school-children? Where did the happy pair go for their wedding trip? Were they happy ever afterwards?

Why this last question, ladies? Do you

want its answer to give you something to weep over with sympathy? or something that may for a few moments cause you to envy one whose lot so little resembles your own?

there was nothing to be lost by it, and a good deal to be won. In parliament there were compact bodies of patriots—anxious to save their country, and advance the cause of civilization, and prove that the ranks of their opponents were made up of hireling traitors and ambitious knaves. Fathers of families, by their firesides spoke of the blessings of peace, and, in the City watered the funds with rumours of war. Mr. St. John Long had, years back, vacated his residence in Harley Street, leaving other quacks behind him. Mr. Montgomery was writing marvellous poetry, and preaching eloquent sermons—as did Dr. Dodd in the last century. There was a new novel which people read and condemned because it was bitter and censorious; and another novel which was praised and not read—because it was amiable, and of honey sweetness. Much agitation pervaded the highest ranks of society about the fashion of ladies' skirts—whether they should be cut short, or made longer and with fuller flounces. There were whispers also afloat of a combination, effected by French

influence, to alter the style of bonnets. These points settled, it was hoped that a smile of patronage would be given to the Royal Academy. A wedding in high life enlivened one side of each morning paper, and a murder in low life the other. There was the ordinary disagreement going on amongst the doctors; divines fighting divines, and authorities of all sorts coming into collision. But it was deemed in bad taste to speak of the contention otherwise than cheerfully. People of the highest tone only smiled on the riot and said nothing. Railways were becoming, throughout the land, common as hen-roosts. It may not be stated whether the crash of '46 had come, or whether King Hudson was still on his throne, holding his court at Albert Gate, and generally regarded as the master-mind of the age; for we are approaching 1863, and must be cautious to avoid personalities, and the sin of paining others.

Royalty had long deserted Brighton; and the Pavilion, so much admired by Mr. Barnum, citizen U.S., America, was standing

desolate—given over to cobwebs, and spiders, and flies. Spiders and flies of another sort had played their little day in the place when it was fresh with gilding, and new from the hands of its artificer;—when a royal humorist painted on the walls, with phosphorus, certain very uncomfortable words that made the court-ladies scream, and run to and fro in the darkness, or faint away, as ladies have a right to faint away when it answers their purpose. But all that is of the past, and, in strict propriety, we ought not to talk about it. Enough for us that the tin-pot palace was empty, and that the inhabitants of that fantastic, queer spot, The Old Steyne, were beginning to ask whether the untenanted rooms could not be turned to public use and amusement. Shades of George IV. and Mrs. Fitzherbert! how the glory of this world passes away! That the halls in which you and yours kept holiday, with wine and wit, music and dance, should be so profaned! That a band of provincial tradesmen should lord it in the very chamber in which, a few short years since, cabinet ministers sat consulting for the common weal!

Brighton had consoled itself for the loss of royalty, and was maintaining, with a very creditable affectation of truth, that the patronage of 'the public' was far more to its taste than the presence of 'the Court.' A hundred visitors came to the town for every ten who visited it in King William's time ; and the change was set down to the absence of the greatest personage of the kingdom. No one ever thought of attributing it to increased facilities of travelling. The logic was questionable, but the prosperity of the place was beyond doubt.

On either cliff lines of new mansions arose, terrace upon terrace ; hotels as big as castles sprung up, abounding in good rooms, good dinners, and good wines, and proving, in all matters pertaining to social enjoyment, the superiority of commercial enterprise over domestic affection. Every day of the season brought fresh crowds of loungers—middle-aged gentlemen looking a great deal too well, and London belles, with cheeks pale and thin ; carriage-loads of children, presided over by imposing matrons, and aged invalids tottering in

the newest styles of dress—on to that oldest fashion of all. Just such a crowd turned out daily on the parade, as one may see any day during the full months on those pleasant promenades, where it is difficult to walk a hundred yards without getting an invitation to dinner.

Away from the cliffs, and behind the streets of lath-and-plaster palaces, lay the old town of Brighton, and its dense population stored away in close alleys that harboured disease, and misery, and appalling crime, little dreamt of by the easy-going pleasure-seekers making holiday on the promenades, laughing and gossipping, and deriving vigour from the fresh sea-breezes. Not that those luckless thousands were altogether uncared for by their fortunate neighbours.

Daily, simple ladies—neither better nor worse than their countrywomen of the same rank, but pure, truthful, earnestly devout, anxious to do good, as the gentle rulers of our English homes ever are—left their houses on errands of charity. Some bent their steps to crowded schools, patiently to spend the

most pleasant hours of the day in teaching little children to spell and read, to use a needle and chant a hymn. Some sat by the beds of their wretched sisters in humanity, entreating, encouraging, and consoling them in their solemn hours, so that neither indifference, nor dread, nor vain remorse might cut them off from salutary penitence. Some, like clerks, took on themselves the irksome drudgery of collecting pence, distributing tickets, and methodically performing all the petty duties, on the regular and efficient discharge of which depends the success of a clothing-club. And this work done, without either ostentation or self-gratulation, they went back to their homes —to give glad greeting to their friends, and make their husbands and sons feel the enjoyment of ‘an evening at home.’ Ladies, if ever men smile at your sacred endeavours, comparing, sarcastically, the puny powers of your humanitarianism with the immensity of the task it desires to accomplish, do not be misled by their idle words. Don’t let their learned jargon about the laws of political eco-

nomy damp your ardour, or their flippant jests dishearten you. Above all, do not misread *them*.

There were, however, sterner labourers in the field—men trained from childhood to the toil—and amongst them all, Bernard Leslie was acknowledged leader and captain. Of a delicate frame and fiery courage, he could not restrain himself from exertions that would have broken a constitution of iron. Verging upon fifty years of age, he had for near a quarter of a century been the admired clergyman of the town. With an intellect that was not only remarkable for its power, but complete with all the graces of perfect culture, with a face which, notwithstanding the decision and unyielding will of the brow and lips, was so delicate in comeliness that it could almost claim the feminine attribute of loveliness, and with a form and style in harmony with his countenance, he was, as a young man, flattered and caressed with dangerous blandishments. Patrons, or rather great people anxious to become his patrons, invited him hither and thither, but he withstood their allurements.

Old college friends applauded, and said that Bernard Leslie had made his fortune. He was the popular preacher of Brighton, and might marry whom he liked. The Prime Minister had been to hear him preach twice, and had invited him to Avor Castle. And by-standers were not at fault. They did not see quite as much of the game as the chief actor in it, but they saw enough to justify their remarks. There is a love that has to be wooed, and a love that comes unsought, and of the latter kind one prize, at least, was presented to Bernard, which an ambitious and self-seeking man would have grasped—swallowing his peck of dirt, and thanking his stars that it was so handsomely gilded. More than once he was offered a valuable piece of preferment;—but such offers he firmly declined, with a petition that his refusal might be kept a secret, as he did not wish his conduct in such affairs to become public talk.

He married a girl from a distant county—a gentle creature of no fortune, whom he had long loved; and for ten happy years they lived in a little mean house, in a back street

of Brighton. At the close of those ten years his wife died, leaving him with one little girl. Those who knew him throughout his career said that from that time he was, in one respect, a different man; that his ordinary conversation lost a certain pleasant humour of subdued drollery which had formerly caused mirth to many, pain to none. The little relaxations which he had been wont to allow himself from labour were discontinued, and with all his heart, and soul, and strength, he strove to accomplish the work that his hand had found. His health would break down, his friends told him; and at the warning, his great eyes brightened with a terrible gladness, and he looked up to the silent heavens.

The man had the zeal of an old-world prophet, and such self-control as well as fortitude, such a subtle adaptiveness as well as sincere desire to please, such a winning sweetness as well as sterling honesty, that none could withstand or mistrust him, or do otherwise than love him. People of the most opposite characters and conditions came round him for advice, and aid, and friendship. The Brighton

operatives, once as discontented and restless a body as could be found in any southern town of England, trusted him to frame the laws of their new reading-room. Petty tradesmen gave up several of their petty gains, and, what followed with the petty gains, several of their substantial physical comforts, because he told them that they could not take one step towards a holy life until they were scrupulously and rigidly honest. And of the great and mighty ones of the earth, many were conveyed to the white cliffs, not that they might breathe the fresh sea air, and hear the voices of the wild waves,—but that they might be near *him*, their teacher and comforter, in their sickness and sore distress.

Is this all romance? and were those lynx-eyed observers right who said that Bernard Leslie was a sanctimonious charlatan? For there were many who took that view of his character. Men of a certain sort, and of an uncertain sort too, lifted their brows with credulous commiseration when his name was mentioned. A shrug of the shoulders, a nod of the head, a smile and a scarcely perceptible sneer on the lip, and then

these knowing gentlemen told you what *they knew* about the “dainty priest.” They were at college with him in old times—they knew all about his life then: well, well, let by-gones be by-gones,—but still one must use them as guides to a man’s true character! Doubtless he had an impressive manner, and his elocution was effective, not to say theatrical;—how could it be otherwise? He was a deuced good actor when he was a young man; he was too clever a fellow to throw away what was good of his early training. There was nothing that told so well in the pulpit as a cautious introduction of ‘stage-business.’ He was very fond of spicing his sermons with quotations from the modern poets. Women liked poetry, and he was never regardless of feminine taste. How else could he have such a crowd of fair admirers? Really it was a fine study to watch him, fascinating his lovely disciples with his musical intonation, his pointed whiskers, and the wave of his fair white hand! Did you know the history of the diamond ring that blazed upon that hand? Never heard that? Dear me, they thought every one knew the story!

But all that tattle is stilled now; and your voice is silent, too, Bernard Leslie!

At the close of a certain rainy February day, in the year to which we have been vaguely directing attention, Bernard Leslie returned home faint, and weary, and dejected, after many hours of work. His child was making a visit in Leicestershire, so he had not a welcome from her when he crossed his threshold. It was a leisure evening with him, and he prepared to enjoy it. His dinner despatched, he had his lamp trimmed, and brought down his *Plato* from its place amongst his honoured collection of the classics. The fire burned brightly in the stove, crackling and throwing a warm glow on the walls of his little book-bound parlour; a fat cat purred on the rug; and the kettle, with its spout pointing straight to the tea-pot, sung sociably at its post on the hot coals. As Bernard Leslie read, the lines of fatigue and disappointment disappeared from his face, and in their place came an expression of serenity that gave his worn, pale countenance the softness of childhood. Perhaps the familiar pages on which his eyes rested had pleasant associations, calling back the sensations of

the reader's happy youth, ere hope had wrestled with experience, and when the field of duty had many flowers and no thistles.

The study door opened, and an old female servant put a letter before him.

"From whom is this? the post hasn't brought it?" asked Bernard.

"The bearer, sir, is a lady's maid; and she says her mistress told her to wait for an answer."

Having broken the seal, Bernard Leslie read the note, and then said, "Tell her, then, that I will call on her mistress within half—no, say—within an hour from this time. Let her hasten back with that answer."

Bernard's old servant left the room, and then he re-read the following letter:—

"No.—, Belgrave Place.

"Dear and Reverend Sir,

"You do not know me, but I beg you earnestly to come to me without delay. I am a sick person moved to make a special confession of my sins, for my conscience is troubled with a weighty matter.

"LUCY ARGENTINE."

"Poor thing!" said Bernard Leslie, "Poor thing! I trust she may find comfort in telling me what this heavy matter is."

In the English church auricular confession is one of those delicate points upon which discussion, on the part both of clergy and laity, is either of a most violent or a most cautious sort. With disputants the words of the rubric countenancing and enjoining it are on the one side strained to comprehend everything, and on the other explained away so as to mean nothing. But the majority of thoughtful people, disliking polemic warfare on all points, take especial care to avoid it on that,—a prudent course that will most unquestionably be followed by this writer. That the clergy themselves have in confession, as a usage of the church, a source of grave and frequently recurring embarrassment, is a matter, which the noisy and virulent opponents of what they are pleased to term 'priestly influence' would do well to reflect. Where the confidence of the confessional ought to terminate; how far it is the duty of a priest to guard the secrets of a penitent, when an avowal of them would aid the cause of justice, prevent crime, or anticipate

a coming calamity; whether the death of the confessing person unseals the lips of his sacred comforter with regard to certain revelations; and, if so, how those revelations are to be defined,—are questions that have perplexed many a conscientious minister.

The writer could point to one eminent divine and zealous parish priest whose invariable rule was to address in these words the penitent who wished to confide to his ears the burdens of a troubled conscience:—"I will pay attention to everything you may say, and if, after I have heard your story, I can give you any directions, especially fitted to afford relief to one in your case, I shall be truly happy to do so; but, before you open your lips, let me warn you that if you make to me any statement, by repeating which, I can clearly promote the interests of justice and morality, I hold myself at perfect liberty to publish it." During his long experience as a clergyman of the Established Church, this wise and earnest man had, on numerous occasions, confessions made to him of the perpetration of great and appalling crimes, but in nearly every instance he satisfied himself that the facts revealed

ince. Without speaking, the priest gazed significantly into his face, and then glanced at a copse down in a hollow on the distant side of the enclosure.

"Yis, yer riverince," said the ruffian, "ye'r jist right, that's the spot, though I niver tould it ye, where I lay when I took my shot at Mr. O'Treene."

"You scoundrel!" cried the priest, "I have you now. You're not in confession, so my lips are not closed. I'll have you arrested before three hours are over."

The worthy priest was as good as his word, and ere six weeks had passed the murderer was hanged.

On reaching the house, in Belgrave Place, designated in the note, Bernard Leslie was conducted to a warm cheerful drawing-room; bright with fire and candles, but unoccupied. In a minute, however, a young lady entered—a graceful, lovely girl—just such an one as we saw years ago at Sharsted High House, playing and laughing at Sir Everard's breakfast-table.

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Leslie," said this young lady, "for coming so speedily

in answer to poor mamma's note. She has been very unwell to-day. Our doctors say that her illness is only nervous; but there's no comfort in that,—for she is very ill."

"Has she been long ill?" asked Bernard.

"She has for years past been an invalid," answered the girl sadly, and with a frank simplicity that was very winning, and caused her companion to think that he should like her to be the friend of his daughter. "She has not, as long as I can remember, had a week together of even tolerable spirits. Before papa died, she was better; though even when he was with us, she would for weeks at a time suffer obstinate attacks of melancholy. But with all her sorrow and grievous ill-health, she is so good, and gentle, and considerate for every one—except herself."

One cannot say how long the young lady would have continued this strain of filial eulogium, had it not been cut short by the entrance of a staid elderly lady's maid who stated that her mistress was ready to receive Mr. Leslie.

At this announcement the clergyman rose to follow the servant, but before he left the room

Mabel Argentine (the young lady had been named after a venerable aunt who was a sponsor at her christening) approached him, with a charming combination of affection and fear, familiarity and diffidence, and glancing up into his face, put her hand in his, and said, "I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Leslie, for coming so quickly. You make me feel very grateful."

"I hope, my dear Miss Argentine, that I may be able to afford real comfort to your mamma, and so give you a better reason for gratitude to me, than you have in my mere readiness to do my duty to the best of my ability."

A large room, dimly lighted by a fire that had no flame. On one side of the fire a screen. In the darkness behind the screen a sofa, on which lay a human figure, covered with wraps, and supported with pillows.

Such were the objects that presented themselves to the vision of Bernard Leslie, when he entered the apartment of the lady who had summoned him to her side.

"I thank you very much for coming to me,"

said the occupant of the sofa; "I fear I have kept you waiting down stairs some time."

"I was most agreeably occupied, Mrs. Argentine, talking to your lovely daughter. She is a charming girl," answered Bernard, kindly, drawing nearer to the lady.

He heard her shudder at this allusion to Mabel, and though it was too dark for him to see her features, he felt the effort she was making to maintain her self-control.

"Esther," were her next words, addressed to her maid, "light all the candles. Let us have plenty of light. Then you may leave us. Mr. Leslie, will you take a chair—that one, at the foot of my screen?"

In a minute the room was brilliant with an illumination of tapers reflected in the mirrors that surrounded the toilet-table. And Bernard Leslie saw before him a woman's face—delicate, and still retaining the evidences of former beauty; but so forcibly expressive of mental anguish, that he started and nearly gave utterance to an exclamation of pain. The face was thin and white as death, not wrinkled by time,

but furrowed with lines bitten into it by intense, unspeakable suffering. The eyes—once so eloquent of mirth and tenderness—had left their original position, and stood prominently forward—eager, watchful, and excited. The hair on her head, still abundant in quantity, could not have been more white had she been eighty years old; but the colour of her eyebrows and eyelashes was still dark.

“Sir,” she began, in a faint, hollow voice, as soon as her servant had quitted the room, “I dread your gaze; but I must learn to bear it, as I must also learn to endure the scrutiny of curious eyes. I ordered all this light, because I would have you see me as I am—because I would nerve myself to support the condemnation my fellow-creatures will look at me when they know me as I am—when they know all my unutterable cruelty and daring. You saw just now my child, Mabel. She is lovely. Innocence sits on every feature of her dear, sweet face; and guileless purity gives a charm to her simple words and winning fashions. What think you her mother is! Tell me. What think you the mother of that girl is?”

Her voice was low, and her words came deliberately from her lips; but in her anxious, eager eye, her attenuated face, and the muscular action, checked but not controlled, of her whole frame, Bernard Leslie saw how vast an effort she was making to obey the voice of duty in this entreaty for his aid. She had no need to throw such tenderness and earnestness into her petition, "Give me them." No man is so genuinely chivalric as a pure and sincerely devout one. Bernard thought of an angel-woman—of her, his boyhood's love, who had been the partner of his manly years, and had been taken from him, years since, to that happy land where there is neither wickedness nor weariness. Eyes of pity and intensest love seemed to beam down upon him from the calm heaven of that imagined country, and a voice was felt rather than heard, saying, "Help her. She is my sister, though an erring one."

Then Bernard said, bowing his silvered head in homage to the sex of the wretched suppliant, "I will try to serve you. But I feel there is not much for me to instruct you in. A mind, cultivated and powerful, that

Soon savage and revengeful eyes will glare at me; harsh, hoarse voices will scream aloud for the pleasant spectacle of my last ignominious punishment; the tale of my enormous and revolting crime will be passed from lip to lip, till gentle girls tremble at the mere mention of my name—and in the kennels where the vile herd, ruffians and outcasts shout with triumph as they see their own lives void of offence, when placed by the side of mine. But I cannot bear all this at once. Thoughts of my ancient lineage (such thoughts make me dread shame, even as they have often made men fear to do the deeds that lead to shame), a miserable egotistic respect for my own early self—(when over the green ways of life lay the freshness of the morning and the clear light of the breaking sun), love of my own dear children—my boys, and that darling girl whom you have seen—reverence for sacred dust that can be dishonoured even in the grave,—all these have withheld me—have made me shrink from my duty. But it shall be so no longer. To-night I will rehearse my part to you alone; to-morrow I will act it to sterner

auditors, to other spectators. Ere a month has passed I'll dare to gaze upon a sea of angry faces."

For a minute she was silent.

The pause she employed in recovering the command of her feelings.

Then she raised herself, so that she sate erect on her sofa,—and fixing her eager and piercing eyes on her companion, speaking in a low musical voice (that was never more than little above a whisper, and yet had many and very different modulations), sometimes waiting a few seconds for breath, but never breaking the thread of her narrative, occasionally giving emphasis to her words by raising a white gossamer hand, but never changing the fixed attitude of her body,—never, even for a second, altering from her death-like pallor,—never shedding one tear of shame, or pride, or contrition,—thus she made a special confession of her sins.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SPECIAL CONFESSTION OF HER SINS.

“THOUGH you are ignorant of my history, my name cannot be otherwise than familiar to you. I am the widow of a member of your order; my husband was a canon and holder of other preferment, and was esteemed for his zeal and the excellence of his writings. I see you remember him. My maiden name was Adenbroke; I was the only daughter of Sir Everard Adenbroke, of Sharsted—the last baronet of his family, and last male representative of his ancient line.

“My father had one other child—a son—Reginald Adenbroke, who won such honour,

as is dear to a soldier, in India. Would that he had won a grave there also! He returned to end his days beneath his father's roof,—beneath his sister's eyes.

“ My mother died when she gave me birth, but I never missed maternal care ; for my father's only sister (a woman of a sacred life) tended to me, and instructed me with more than a mother's solicitude.

“ My father was a poor man. The imprudences of a youth of singular temptations had impoverished him, and in his old age he had bitter occasion to repent the abuse of early advantages. I will not tell you how I loved him ; I would rather have you think me incapable of loving any one, with the exception of myself. He did not marry till late in life, so that when I was entering on womanhood, he had completed that long measure of human existence,—beyond which man finds only weariness and vexation of spirit. But he was a hale, vigorous, grand old man—the admiration of all who saw him, the love of all who knew him.

“ When I was quite a young girl, some

seventeen years of age, I fell in love with Hugh Argentine. He was the only and orphan son of a near neighbour and dear friend of my father's. I will not speak more of him in these dark confessions than I am forced, for to do so would seem like coupling him with my crime,—like accusing him of complicity in my heinous offence. But, oh, how I loved him! My too great love of him has wrought my perdition; I know it;—and yet I am glad that I loved him.

“We were engaged to be married, with the consent and approval, ay, with the enthusiastic congratulations, of my father and my aunt. But we were too poor to marry. Like hopeful children we agreed to wait. I said that it mattered not how long we had to wait, for the joy of being engaged was enough, and more than enough, for me. Hugh had only a curacy in London; my father could not give me an allowance sufficient to support me as his wife. But we had prospects. We trusted that, ere long, one of our many powerful friends would give Hugh a living, or—or—(but you know how poor people hope). Nay,

I will leave nothing to your imagination, but go on step by step.

“Time taught me to see the world with other eyes than those with which I gazed on life’s sunny prospect—when Hugh asked me to be his wife. Ere long I wanted more happiness. To be separated from him for months and months was so hard and cruel a lot that I could not be contented with it. In my lonely hours of pining, and dreaming, and castle-building, I would find comfort in imagining occurrences, that should result in making either me or Hugh rich, and enabling us to marry. Often I dreamt of preferment being given him, or rivers of wealth coming to me from unknown sources.

“But one tempting, alluring, fascinating thought ever recurred.

“Hugh had a rich uncle, an enormously wealthy man. He was very aged and infirm, and had no relative but his nephew. The question would keep recurring—where is all this money to go? And the answer always was—‘to Hugh, to my future husband, to me; one day I shall be rich.’ I was a good,

right-minded girl, and could I but have known to what wickedness this seductive thought was to lead me, I would have overcome it when it was vague and feeble—long ere it was well-defined and strong, and had overcome me.

“I was not aware what might it had over me till one day, in my private room, to my unspeakable horror, my conscience breaking in upon me, in the midst of my intoxicating visions of wealth, revealed to me that I was secretly saying, ‘Oh, that that old man would die, and leave Hugh his wealth!’ I fell on my knees, and implored my Father in heaven to help me to crush Satan. But it was too late. My prayers were unheard. There is, I believe, a certain point in the course of wicked imagination from which there is no return for the erring soul, to pure and holy thought, save by an onward career—through the consummations of its evil devices—to that bitter repentance which is the child of remorse. This may be wrong. Anyhow, I was not heard.

“A few days afterwards I was with my dear old father, when my ghostly enemy led him to speak words—careless, unconsidered—every

one of which led me a step further on the road leading to destruction, on which I had entered. He lamented that I could not marry, that he had no money to give me. He accused himself of selfishness in not having saved from his narrow means a dowry for me. He told me (a thing I never had thought of before) that if my brother died, I should be the possessor of the old family seat and the estate —still yielding us twelve hundred pounds a year. He expressed, in various passionate terms, his earnest wish that somehow a fortune might come to me and Hugh, enabling us to put a period to the delay that would soon wear away my health. He finished by hoping that soon Hugh's uncle would die, leaving him all his money.

"Then I knew that the devil was biting away, and cankering my dear generous father's heart, just as the same evil power was sowing in mine the seeds of damnable crime. I saw our danger—his and mine. A paroxysm of affright seized me, and to that dear beloved father I spoke—preaching for his weakness and praying for mine. I remember saying,

'Father, a little wicked thought soon becomes a great one—a strong tree, of rapid growth and mighty branches, bearing fruit that is deadly sin. Let us pray not to be led into temptation. Do you remember Pharaoh's dream? '*And, behold, there came up out of the river seven well-favoured kine and fat-fleshed; and they fed in a meadow. And, behold, seven other kine came up after them out of the river, ill-favoured and lean-fleshed, and stood by the other kine upon the brink of the river. And the ill-favoured and lean-fleshed kine did eat up the seven well-favoured and fat kine.*' Father, the well-favoured kine were the pure, sacred aspirations and pious resolves of a human life; and the seven ill-favoured kine were wicked thoughts, and one such had, by itself, been able to accomplish the work of destruction.'

"Sir, I was quite right. For me, one wicked thought did accomplish the work of destruction.

"The old man, on whose wealth, on whose death we had so wickedly counted, died, and all his riches went to what he termed *charity*.

Not a shilling came to my husband. I deserved the punishment, but Hugh did not. He had always—well, well, I need not plead for him. His goodness has long since been acknowledged.

"We had to wait again. Then at last the blackness of disappointment fell upon me. It seemed that God's condemnation of our vile desires was manifest in the mode in which our calculations had been put to confusion. And so it was manifested. From that day to this, His judgment has weighed upon me. I became very ill. My mind gave way under the combined attacks of bodily disease and the goads of a stricken conscience. I had brain fever. My life almost left me. And for a long period after the perils of death had been escaped, my physicians prescribed continual change, and incessant care that I suffered under no distressing influences.

"Just as I was restored to health, my brother returned from India. I had not seen him for years. He left England with his regiment for the West Indies at least two years before my engagement, and from the

West he proceeded to the East Indies on the outbreak of war. He came home at last to Sharsted, covered with glory, to die as women only ought to die, consumed by an insidious malady that by slow degrees of torture reduced him to the weakness of childhood. He had been so long away from me, and I had grown so absorbed in my own selfish hopes and disappointments, that I had ceased to think much about him; but when I saw him once again, the victim of consumption, doomed not to enjoy the honours he had so nobly won, the memory of all his old love for me and mine for him came upon me, and I would gladly have died for him, so completely did early affection revive within me.

"I nursed him tenderly. But the doctors said his case was hopeless; and on every side I was assured that his illness could have but one termination. To that end I continually looked. So did he. Instead of avoiding it in conversation, he would frequently direct my thoughts to it, encouraging me to anticipate the happiness I should experience when his death would leave me heiress to the family

estate, and remove the only barrier in the way of my marriage. He would amuse himself with producing pleasant word-pictures of my domestic felicity, my children, my husband, my dear old father's joy in witnessing the fulfilment of my wishes.

"Under such guidance, how could I do otherwise than follow? I drank in his words. They seemed so sanctified by unselfishness, that I could not suspect them of leading me astray. Moreover, his gentle, calm demeanour, and his deep affection manifested for me in those solemn days, roused all the best emotions of my nature, and diverted my attention from the sordid calculations, and impious hopes that lurked within me. Of course, I knew how bad I was; but the long training I had passed through had taught me how to look away from the baseness which I knew to be in me, and yet dared not contemplate. In my heart there was unceasingly going on a crafty, wily, subtle process of self-deceit—persuading me that the prospect of my brother being taken from me filled me with consternation, persuading me I did *not* wish his death, per-

suading me that selfish considerations of my own worldly advancement were repugnant to my sisterly love—were impossible.

“Sir—he grew worse. Our family physician said he could not live many days; when, to the astonishment of all, he rose, like one rising from the grave, seemed to master his malady, and progressed towards robust health.—Then our doctor told another story.—Since his patient had so rallied, he might live for years.

“All my airy castles fell away. Instead of becoming an heiress, I was destined to more long, long weary years of waiting. Looking forward to my blank existence, confounded, stupified, horror-stricken with my own baseness, I heard, night and day, a hissing croaking, mocking, taunting devil perpetually repeating, ‘The little wicked thought has become a strong tree, with mighty branches, bearing fruit that is deadly sin! The one lean creature has devoured all the well-favoured kine! ’Tis my work! You are mine! Your are mine!’

“Mr. Leslie—listen:—*from that time I was Satan’s.*

“My brother had a relapse. He was on

the point of starting for a warmer climate, when he broke another blood-vessel, and was thrown back upon the bed which he never again left alive.

“Again I was by his side, nursing him, but with a hideous resolve at my heart.

“Sir, one night I sat alone, watching his faint slumber. Sleep was the only thing that could save him. Our doctor had given me a strong composing draught, a portion of which I was to administer to him if he should be restless.

“Ere long he woke from his slight doze, and meekly telling me that he was about to fall into another slumber from which he would not wake in this world, he kissed me, thanked me for all my love and care, and bade me farewell. I went to the table on which the medicines stood, and, having mixed a cooling, effervescent draught, gave it to him to drink.

“That night he died.

“I was still sitting by his lifeless body when our physician entered, and led me from the room. Pointing to a narcotic draught, of which not a drop was consumed, he said, touchingly, ‘Ah, he sleeps without that.’

"But, Mr. Leslie, he did not fall to rest without narcotic medicine—

"Come nearer—nearer—and listen—

"I had a bottle of the same medicine (the doctor had given it me on some prior occasion, and it had not been used) and I poured the *whole* of it into the effervescent draught. I, his sister, *murdered him.*"

* * * * *

"I won the prize for which I had played—so falsely.

"My brother had been dead little more than twelve months when I became the wife of Hugh Argentine, on whom Fortune, as if to teach me the inutility of my crime, even as to immediate results, had unexpectedly conferred wealth more than sufficient for our desires.

"In the church—the quiet, peaceful little church, filled with the monuments, and concealing the dust, of my ancestors, in which, from sinless childhood, I had worshipped my God, and pondered on the mysterious truths of my religion—I was married. The friends of my early days—lovely and high-born girls, with hearts as spotless as their lineage—ac-

companied me to that church, and in their fair wedding-robcs surrounded me, anxious and hopeful for my future weal, and glad at my present happiness. And I—I gave my hand to my husband, and swore to love, honour and obey him; I took the great sacrament of a woman's life—standing *on the very stone*, at the altar-rails, beneath which lay the body of the brother I had killed.

“ You may well be speechless with astonishment and horror, starting from me with affright, as an unclean, poisonous, baleful creature.

“ You do not now wonder how it is that, though I am still far distant from the period of old age, my frame is broken, and my beauty scattered, and my hair white as—as my heart is black. You wonder only how it is that I have lived to tell you a story such as this. I, too, marvel' at that. But my narrative shall end here. With all the windings, and shifting mutations of my life-torture I will not pain you. Indeed I could not paint them to you. The anguish of the worm that never dies is a secret to be learnt only by experience.

"For some space of time the unceasing struggle within me did not manifest itself so as to attract general observation. My friends noticed that my cheek was blanched, and that, at times, it was only by an effort that I could maintain my old customary cheerfulness; and my husband knew that a dark, unspeakable gloom would fitfully fall upon me, rendering me for hours the victim of a dull, speechless sorrow; but he and they set these signs down as mere indications of naturally delicate health. For, at intervals, my old smiles, the music of my old laughter, and even my girlish hilarity would return.

"To prolong my torture, enabling me to endure life that I might again and again suffer the stings of remorse, Satan, who had lured me to my crime, instructed me in a crafty process of self-delusion from which I have, on almost countless occasions, derived temporary comfort. 'These fancies,' I would say to myself, 'so frequently recur and take possession of my mind, that I must nerve myself to repel them. What are these groundless, but horrible, visions of guilt? I know how, step by

step, they arose out of nothingness. Let me recall. When I was an inexperienced girl, at the most excitable and susceptible period of a woman's life, I was tempted into sordid and unfeeling calculations of the advantage I should derive from the death of another. My selfish anticipations were no more than what honest and well-intentioned people indulge in every day of their lives; but to me—reflecting on myself, and, with morbid anxiety, searching the hidden corners of my heart—they appeared so cruel, and hateful, and unspeakably wicked, that I felt no punishment would be too severe for my sin of having entertained them. Well, this unhealthy habit of introspection, and this distorted view of my inner life, became so strengthened by solitude, and disappointment, and the depressing circumstances of my life, that I positively came to regard myself as an extreme instance of moral deformity. Indeed, my mind was so agitated, and my reason so unstrung, that my physicians treated me as an invalid, the seat of whose malady lay in a disordered intellect. I remember well that my disease rose to such a height, that (because,

in a careless moment, the consideration, of how pleasant to me would be the death of a rich old man, had taken the form of a wish that he might die) I actually looked on myself as really and truly guilty of his blood. I must not forget this. Next followed a train of circumstances which led me to contemplate the contingencies of my own brother's death in the same selfish spirit as that in which I had looked forward to the old man's demise. Especially on the very night of my dear brother's death, through some perversity of my mental and moral constitution, these vile thoughts of individual aggrandizement insinuated themselves into my heart, and suggested to me an act that I never perpetrated; an act that was so repugnant to my nature, that even to have imagined it upset the balance of my mind, and rendered me unable to distinguish between a vagrant evil imagination, and the accomplishment of that which it proposed. On this subject I am a monomaniac, or liable to become one. In my dark hours let me never forget what I now see in my lucid period. This awful picture, of a sister

administering poison to her brother, is a work of my diseased imagination. There is peril that an unspeakably horrible delusion may get the mastery of my mind. I must resist it.'

"Was not this a master-piece of hypocrisy? Conceive a mind so subtle, and crafty, and elastic as to have conceived it, and acted it with such success, that for long passages of time it could drug conscience to repose!

"But all these efforts at self-deceit availed only to give a temporary respite. As the months proceeded, the occasion recurred when this veil of cunning misrepresentation dropped, and left my soul standing, before my gaze, in all its hideous damnable iniquity.

"And now the Fury of my life is driving me on to the accomplishment of my miserable career and the perfection of my shame. I must render to justice what is due to justice. I have three children—my girl, and my noble boys, whose swords are flashing in the East. They must participate in my ignominy. *There* is the sting of the whip. But I must endure it. I may not shrink from it. It is my destiny—my atonement. I will deliver myself

up to the reprobation of all mankind, and an infamous death."

Throughout this strange and terrible revelation she maintained the command of her feelings. She broke down at no part of her wild incredible story, never pausing or faltering, unless to give effect to her terrible utterances. And now that she had concluded her confession, and disburthened her full soul of all its wail of guilt, she did not give way to womanly tears, but sate in the same attitude, stoically waiting the reply of her auditor.

"Mrs. Argentine," said Bernard Leslie, in a deep voice, after a long pause, "with regard to your communication, I will on this occasion say little, save that I am profoundly touched by it—that I deeply commiserate your wretched condition. To-night you are not in a condition to profit by any exhortation that I can give you. Try this night to get a little sleep. To-morrow you will be more tranquil. But before I go, promise me what I ask."

She was moved with his earnest and entreating tones, so devoid of condemnation, and so eloquent of compassion. The tears

came into her eyes; and, with a look in which surprise, and confidence, and humble gratitude were combined, she took his outstretched hand and looked up into his gentle and toil-worn face.

"Will you be guided by me?—will you rely on me?"

"I will do your bidding,—I promise," she faintly answered.

"You must make the communications of this evening to no one else. I must be the sole guardian of your secret. The promptings of your maternal affections are the admonition of a good power that would preserve you from further suffering and error. To carry out your resolve of publishing your melancholy history to the world would be not only unwise, it would be wicked. Did the world know that your brother met his end by unlawful means, the cause of public morality might possibly enjoin you to make a full confession of your guilt — and, in undergoing the extreme punishment of society, give another case in support of the great general rule, that discovery follows surely on the steps of crime.

But here there is no such inducement to admit the public to the secrets of your heart; and there is one all-sufficient reason why our lips should on this subject be for ever sealed to the outer world. The revelation would have an injurious and demoralising effect on society, by informing the tempted that such iniquity may spring up in quarters where its presence would be deemed impossible, and that it may, for an entire generation, escape detection, and then only come to light through the voluntary confession of the criminal. Let, then, your maternal heart rest on the interests of your children. Rely on me when I say that you ought to do so. During this night will think of and pray for you. To-morrow we shall be better able to discuss this subject."

Then Bernard Leslie took leave of the penitent.

The rain and clouds had been driven off by the riotous wind, which, having cleared the atmosphere of cold vapour, had lulled and died away. In the calm still firmament the moon was shining, and on the rustling sea was a silver

track that seemed to lead from the shore to another and a better land.

All was silent—not a human being stirring on the cliff, save Bernard Leslie, who walked slowly to his home, pondering on the scene in which he had just borne part.

Ere he entered the door of his dwelling he raised his eyes from the ground, and, looking upwards, said : “It is a delusion. All the goodness and all the weakness of humanity unite to assure me so. She is the victim of a delusion.”

The next day, as Bernard Leslie was setting out for his day’s work, a note, the handwriting of which he immediately recognised, was given to him. It ran thus:—

“ Belgrave Place.

“ Dear Sir,

“ I cannot rest, till you have the goodness again to visit me, under the apprehension that you may have misjudged me. I remember, distinctly, all that passed between us last night, and am both greatly relieved at having at length a human sharer of my secret,

and sincerely grateful to you for your compassion. My bodily strength and mental faculties have been worn away in a fierce contest with the creations of my imagination. *The terrible delusion* that has haunted and tormented me through life, I have never before dared to impart to any one. How could I tell it to my father? or husband? or children? Of late years, with the decay of my nervous vigour, my madness —(I have courage, to you, to call it by its right name)—has visited me more frequently, and caused me a keener anguish than formerly. Suffering is the natural consequence of sin. My disease is the merited penalty of my wickedness in having vaguely thought that which was evil. But now that I have you for a consoler, the periods of my darkness will be less frequently recurrent, and of shorter duration. And under your guidance, I humbly trust that I may be of greater use to my fellow-creatures than I have for many a day been.

“ Dear Sir, I am,

“ Your very grateful

“ LUCY ARGENTINE.”

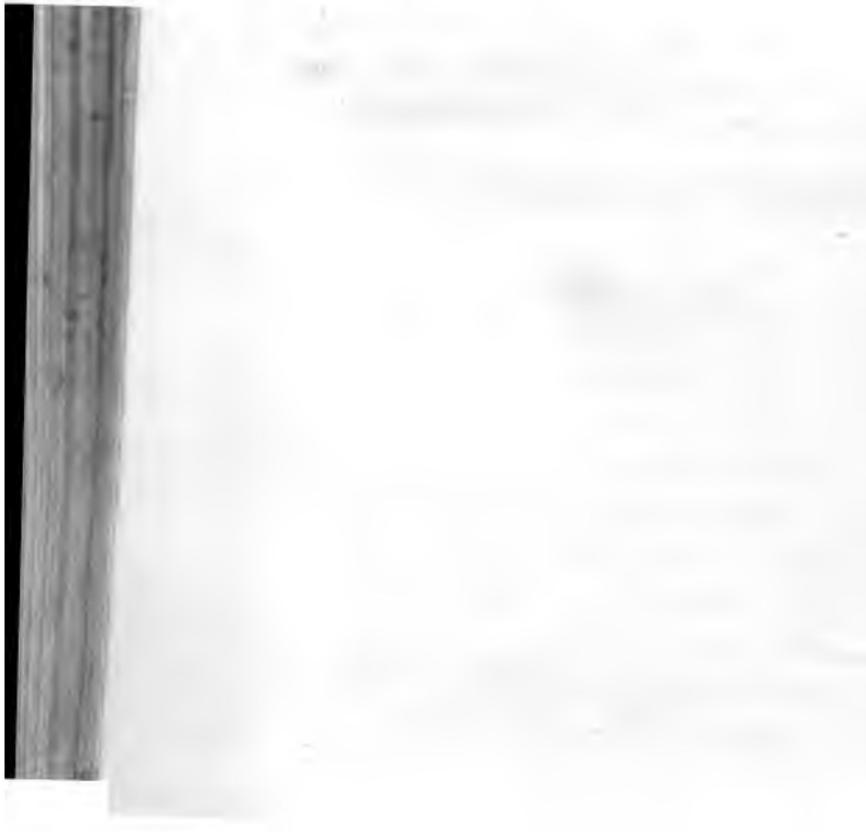
CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

WHICH was the language of truth—her letter? or her confession? Was the epistle guileless? or was it only a return on the part of the unhappy lady to what she termed her ‘masterpiece of hypocrisy?’—Guilty, or not guilty?—Has the reader a doubt? Then, let the prisoner have the benefit of it. He may, if his mind is over-nice in matters of evidence, even return a verdict of—“Not Proven;” and, so leave guilt, or innocence of ‘Sir Everard’s Daughter’ an open question.

Has the writer of these pages an opinion on the matter? Does he think his heroine guilty

of the atrocity which she confessed herself to have perpetrated? His answer is—"She thought the evil. And to think evil—is sin. She struggled against the thought. And to combat the tempters of the mind—is virtue."



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